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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



OUT FLEW RUPERT DANE'S ARM, AND FELL ST. JOHN TO THE FLOOR.

HER FATHER'S SECRETARY.

—301—

CHAPTER I.

"I SHOULD have known what course to pursue with a son, but a daughter puzzles me. Young girls' love affairs are like two-edged swords—dangerous to meddle with," said Mr. Melville, slowly, stopping abruptly in his rapid pace up and down the luxurious library of his villa—the prettiest place in the neighbourhood—and turning a very perturbed face to his wife.

"I have no doubt," he went on, energetically, "but that your curmishers are the merest nonsense, my dear. Girls of seventeen are usually romantic, yet I cannot agree with you that there is any secret love affair between our daughter Gwendolen and my private secretary, Rupert Dane. The young fellow is handsome and gentlemanly—that I grant you—but he has too much good sense to aspire to the hand of a millionaire's daughter, I fancy. Why, his meagre salary

could not supply her with bon-bons! If I thought either of them had the slightest idea of anything of that kind, I would discharge him at once, though I do not know how I should get on without him in my contest for a seat in Parliament next year. He is invaluable to me," he added, knitting his brows thoughtfully together. "I repeat, you must be mistaken, my dear, in imagining there is anything more than common courtesy requires—because they are living under the same roof—between him and Gwendolen."

"I wish I felt equally sanguine about the matter," responded Mrs. Melville, drawing aside the rich lace curtains from the window with her white, jewelled hand, and gazing thoughtfully out into the storm of whirling snow-flakes. "Gwen is impetuous and wilful," she went on; "and if she should take it into her head that she was really very much in love with Rupert Dane, we should have no end of trouble with her. I hope I am mistaken in my suspicions, as you say; but, my dear Horace, when a young girl's face flashes scarlet whenever a young man's

name is mentioned—when she starts confusedly if she hears his footstep, and her voluble tongue is strangely silent when he is about—depend upon it she is in love with him. And these are Gwen's symptoms whenever your young secretary is near. I do not like it. You well know, Horace, I used every argument last year, when you signified your intention of bringing a young and handsome man into the house in that capacity. You remember I said I hoped you would never rue it."

"Nothing shall come of it!" declared Mr. Melville, bringing his clenched hand down so fiercely on the marble mantel that all the bric-a-brac was in imminent danger of being demolished. "Gwendolen knows as well as you do that I have already selected the man whom I wish her to marry. Any young girl of common sense would like the prospect of so good a husband as Cecil St. John. He has wealth, good looks, position, influence—everything, in fact, to recommend him. When he asked me if he might have permission to speak to Gwendolen at

the Christmas ball, I made answer that if he could gain her consent to marry him, no one would be better pleased than myself. To speak plainly, I consented to Gwen's giving this ball purposely to bring this thing about. St. John will be down from London to-day, to remain until the week after the ball."

"I have noticed for some time past that Mr. St. John cared for Gwen, and it is equally as noticeable that Gwen cares nothing for him. Indeed, I may almost add, I think she feels quite an aversion towards him," said Mrs. Melville.

The conversation was brought to an abrupt ending by the sound of carriage wheels and a peal of gay, girlish laughter without, and the next instant a carriage drawn by a pair of prancing, mettlesome horses dashed up the drive to the porch.

"It's Gwen!" exclaimed Mrs. Melville, surprisedly, as she saw a young girl spring from a nest of fur robes to the snow-covered ground without waiting for assistance, and run lightly up the marble steps. "Now, who would have imagined that girl was out in a storm like this! She is like a wild bird—the more inclement the weather the better she likes it."

There was no answer. She turned round hastily and saw that her husband had quitted the room.

A moment later the door of the library was flung open, and a young girl in a sealskin jacket and cap, flying jet-black curls, and cheeks like full-blown roses, sprang into the room like a veritable whirlwind, and before Mrs. Melville could utter one word of remonstrance she was subjected to a bear-like hug that almost took her breath away.

"Gwen!" she exclaimed, severely, "when will you ever learn that at seventeen you are expected to have the refinement and quiet, elegant deportment of a young lady of society! Your impulsive manner is quite shocking! Where were you?"

The girl laughed a ringing laugh that sounded like the gay ripple of a mountain brook, as she tossed off her cap and jacket.

"In answer to question number one, mamma," she said, with a saucy twinkle in her great dark, velvety eyes that looked so demurely out from the long, curling lashes, and pouting the reddest and sweetest pair of rosebud lips that ever were seen, "I have a perfect horror of your society automaton. I can be that when I'm too old to enjoy gaiety and life. And as to where I've been, why, it would be ever so much easier to tell you where I have not been. But the best part of the drive was the race we had on the avenue. Our neighbours across the way had out their new greys, and we raced 'em. Graciosa! but wasn't it exciting, though! The people on the pavement stood still, craning their necks and fairly holding their breath. I tell you it was intense, for the blacks and the greys were neck and neck from the very start. It was not knowing then, and the road was smooth as glass. 'Oo, Lightfoot! Oo, Dixie!' I shouted. I couldn't help it, I was so excited. I wouldn't have been beaten for the whole world. 'Give 'em the reins, Jack!' I yelled. They must have heard my voice, for they suddenly darted forward as though shot from a bow—and the blacks won the race! Oh, my! you never saw such excitement. People shouted and waved hats and handkerchiefs as though they were going mad. I was afraid the blacks would run away, the tumult was so great. But I see you are not very well pleased about it, mamma, so I won't tell you the rest—the worst part of it."

"You may as well finish, seeing that you have commenced," replied her mother, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"Well, as we were skimming over the little bridge that crosses the mill stream, we came within an ace of running over a young girl—Gladys Barton. You remember her, don't you, mamma?" continued Gwen. "She's the old miller's niece, whom I sent fruit and flowers to when she was so ill with the fever last summer, and paid a doctor out of my own pocket-money to attend. She was walking in the road, and the snow was coming down so swiftly by that time that Jack did not see her until we were fairly

upon her. It was too late to shout—too late to cry out. The pole struck her, and sent her headlong to one side into the roadway. Her wild shriek frightened the horses, and they swerved suddenly to the right. That saved her life. Jack picked her up badly frightened, but not a bit hurt. We took her home, and—mamma, to—make amends for the fright we had given her, I—could not—help inviting her to my Christmas ball. I—I hope you do not object."

"Gladys Barton! You invited her to your ball!" Mrs. Melville fairly shrieked, in amazement. "Gwen, do I hear aright! You invited that nobody! Are you taking sudden leave of your senses?"

"Not quite, mamma!" returned Gwendolen Melville composedly. "I could not help wanting to give that shy, sweet young girl one happy evening in her sad young life. She has never been to a ball or gay gathering. I knew it would be a glimpse of fairyland to her, and she may never have the opportunity to go to another."

"I can only hope that she will have the good sense to remain away," retorted Mrs. Melville, wrathfully. "What would Mr. St. John or any of his set say to be brought face to face with a girl like that in our ball-room!"

Gwen crested her dark, curly head, her pretty red lips curled, and her grand dark eyes flashed.

"I don't care what Mr. St. John thinks, mamma," she said, snapping her white fingers. "I fairly hate him. The ball would be all the pleasanter if you had not invited him."

Mrs. Melville was too diplomatic a woman to ruin her cause by attempting to argue the merits of Cecil St. John with her daughter. She well knew that Gwen would thrive best under opposition, so she answered carelessly enough,—

"I am much relieved that you have not taken a fancy to Mr. St. John, for it would have been a useless attachment; it would take a girl of extraordinary beauty and fascination to awaken a thrill in his heart. The beauties of Long Branch fairly hypnotized him when he was there last summer, but not one of them made the least impression on him. To win him a girl would have to be more wondrously lovely than the fair Helen of Troy. You are quite right, Gwen. Do not waste your thoughts upon him."

And with this parting shot, Mrs. Melville tranquilly left the room, knowing full well the girl would reflect upon what she had said. To warn her against St. John would be the surest way of attracting her toward him.

She was quite right.

Gwen crossed the room slowly, muttering to herself,—

"I do not believe he is so hard to win as mamma supposes. Why, if I ever read admiration in any man's eyes, I can read it in Cecil St. John's when he looks at me. I—"

"Gwen!"

The name was uttered in a low, deep voice close by her side.

The girl sprang from the low velvet hassock on which she had flung herself, her face suffused with blushes.

"Is it you, Rupert!" she said. "How you frightened me!"

"I am so sorry, darling," he said, penitently. "I spoke to you twice, but you were thinking so deeply that you did not hear me. I saw you smile, and I almost prayed that you were thinking of me. Were you, Gwen?"

She looked up into the ardent face of her lover, and felt almost guilty to think her thoughts had been so far away from him.

Almost any other young girl's heart would have gone out to him, he was such a handsome, brave, bonny, young fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, with the tenderest and brownest of eyes, brown hair waving back from a splendid brow, and a brown moustache half-revealing, half-concealing a pair of firm, true lips.

"I have been watching you for five minutes, Gwen," he said. "A mad impulse seized me to kneel at your feet, kiss your white hands, and worship you; but I drew back with a sudden sense of fear. Oh, Gwen, are you sure you love me—sure that your heart will never change! Oh, Gwen, I often wonder how I have dared to love you—I, who am only your

father's secretary! Ah! how have I ever dared to love you, who are heiress to a million! What will be the end of this love-dream!"

CHAPTER II.

GWENDOLEN AND GLADYS.

"How will this love-dream of ours end, Gwen!" repeated Rupert Dane, huskily, his fair, handsome face paling a little, as he caught the girl's white hands, and looked eagerly, searchingly down into her beautiful face. "Have you ever thought what the end must be!"

"No," she said, hurriedly. "The present is so happy, I do not like to think of the future."

"But I think of it, Gwen," he said; "and the one thought forever uppermost in my mind is: if your parents find out that we love each other, they will try to separate us; and if they should by any chance succeed, it would kill the best part of me."

"How well you must love me, Rupert!" she said, nestling both little hands confidently in his.

"I wish I could tell you how much, dear," he whispered, with a little catch in his breath. "I wish I could do some valiant deed that would jeopardize my very life for your dear sake; you would see how gladly I would do it. But tell me, Gwen, what did your mother say to you about coming into the library last evening and seeing me holding your hand? Do not hesitate to tell me dear."

"I am sure she did not see it, Rupert, for I snatched my hand so quickly away from you when I heard the door open. If she had seen she would surely have mentioned it."

He looked greatly relieved.

"I try to be very careful for your sake, dear," he said, gently; "but it seems to me the whole world must see in my face, whenever I am near you how much I love—ay, worship you, my Gwen! Oh, if I were only rich, that I might go boldly to your father and mother and ask them for you; but to breathe one word of it now would mean separation for us. But we must manage to meet oftener, Gwen. When a whole day passes and I do not see you I am wretched. I sometimes wish you had a confidential companion by whom I could send notes to you at times. Do you know, dear, I have the uneasy fancy that Marie, your maid, is spying upon us! It is so hard to be obliged to meet secretly."

"Yes, it is too bad," returned Gwen, with a sigh; "but we have no other alternative, you see. We must meet secretly, or not at all. But I must leave you now, Rupert. There is the luncheon bell. Don't you hear it! Let go my hands."

"On one condition: remember we are engaged lovers, Gwen," he said, bending his fair, handsome head nearer her. "Can you not guess the condition!"

"If I guess it will you free my hand!" she cried, archly.

"Yes," he agreed, eagerly.

"Well, it is that—that some one must—kiss—"

"—you." Exactly," he cried, gaily, freeing her hands instantaneously, and holding out his arms.

But with the quickness of a bird she flew past him, eluding his outstretched arms, with the blithest, merriest, most mischievous musical laugh that ever set a poor fellow's heart distracted.

"Oh, you cruel Gwen!" he cried. "But with the sound of that rippling laughter she was gone, and he was standing alone in the flitting glow of the firelight."

"My bright, beautiful Gwen," he mused. "Ah, Heaven, how I love her! How I shall strive for wealth for her dear sake; ay, as man has never before. What a cruel ordering of fate it is that some men have so much gold they hardly know what to do with it, while others toil like galley-slaves the best part of their lives and get barely enough to keep body and soul together!"

The young secretary went slowly back to the lawyer's study and applied himself very assiduously to the great pile of briefs lying before him.



on the desk. But it was no easy matter with a pair of dark, laughing eyes, and a lovely, dimpled rosy face, that set his heart and brain in a whirl, floating between him and the pages.

"It is quite useless," he cried, at length, in despair, flinging down his pen, and catching up his hat. "I will take a little turn outside, and smoke a cigar."

Suited the action to the word, Rupert Dane was soon walking down the avenue, as the principal residence street of the picturesque town was called.

As he turned the first corner, a carriage dashed past him. He knew it was the Melville turnout, even before he glanced up; but with that swift glance his face flushed and his eyes kindled.

Gwen was in a back seat; beside her sat a fair young girl whose plain hat and jacket formed a striking contrast to those of the millionaire's petted daughter.

Rupert raised his hat with a low bow as the carriage with its occupants dashed past.

He was not surprised to see Gwen out so soon again.

She was like a swallow—here, there, everywhere in the shortest space of time; but he did wonder, as he walked briskly along, who the sweet-faced, blue-eyed girl was who was with her.

When Gwen had left him she could not help but think during luncheon of the words he had said.

"I wish you had a companion whom we could both trust. I cannot help thinking Marie, your maid, is spying on us."

And at this critical time Marie had sent down word to Mrs. Melville and her daughter that her relatives had written for her to come home to spend the holidays, and if Miss Gwendolen could spare her just now she would dearly like to go.

Mrs. Melville's brows met in a deep frown as the butler delivered Marie's message, which she was too timid to deliver herself, and face Mrs. Melville's anger.

"Servants are always wanting to leave just when you have the most use for them," she declared, sharply. "You will need Marie until after the ball, Gwen. Why can she not stay until then?"

But as Gwen listened, a happy thought came to her all in an instant.

"Let Marie go by all means, mamma," she said, eagerly. "I shall get along very well without her, I am sure. I could get the miller's niece, Gladys Barton to come to me as companion for the two weeks Marie will be absent."

"Well, suit yourself about it, my dear," returned Mrs. Melville.

So they settled it that if Gwen could get Gladys to come to her, Marie might get off by the afternoon train.

Gladys Barton was amazed when she saw the grand Melville carriage, with its prancing horses stop at their humble door, and more than amazed when she learned Miss Melville's errand.

"I shall be glad to go with you if aunt is willing," she said, raising her sweet, shy blue eyes to Gwen's face; adding earnestly: "I would do anything in this world for you, to try to repay you for your kindness to me last summer."

"Would you?" said Gwen, in a very low whisper.

"Yes," replied Gladys, earnestly.

And she wondered greatly what Miss Melville meant by the words,—

"I will put you to the test very soon."

Gladys' aunt raised no objection to the plan, and thus it was the girl soon found herself seated beside Gwen in the grand carriage, skimming swiftly over the ground for a fortnight's stay as Gwen's companion.

"We can talk very confidentially to each other on our way home," said Gwen.

"Yes," assented Gladys, but she wondered vaguely what Gwendolen Melville, the beautiful, proud young heiress, could have to say confidentially to her.

"I—I may as well come to the point at once, Gladys," said Gwen. "I want you to help me in a—love affair. There now, the worst is out."

"I help you in a love affair!" echoed Gladys.

"Oh, Miss Gwen, how could I ever do it!"

"To explain how you can help me, it is necessary that you should understand all about the matter. It is told in a few words. I—I have a lover, Gladys, and we love each other to distraction; but as he is poor, he would not dare ask papa for me. He is papa's secretary. If either of my parents knew of our love, he would be dismissed on the instant it was discovered, and then we should both surely die, because we would be separated. So you see how very careful we have to be in our conduct to each other before people."

"Yes," assented Gladys, her girlish sympathies fully enlisted.

"Rupert is the grandest fellow in the world, if he is poor," Gwen went on rapidly, "and the handsomest. When you see my mamma you will understand how useless it would be to ask her to sanction our love. I have heard her say, time and again, that she would rather see me laid in my grave than married to a man who was penniless. Papa is even worse than she is on this subject, though he is so rich. Rupert, as I have said before, has nothing. A miserly old uncle of his might take it into his head, when he is dying, to make him his heir; but ten chances to one he won't, for he does not like Rupert at all, owing to a quarrel they once had."

"You can imagine, Gladys, how hard it is for Rupert and me to get a chance to see each other. We used to take long rambles through the grounds in summer, but we cannot do that now. We were walking down the road on two occasions lately, when we came face to face with mamma, and, oh, Gladys, I am so terrified lest she suspects something. I love mamma dearly; but, oh, it would break my heart to give up my lover."

"And now, Gladys, I have come to the point where I can explain to you how you can help me. I will introduce you to Rupert, and he must pay great attention to you and take you about—to the matinee, to my ball, etc. That would, to use a common phrase, throw mamma completely off the track. And then, Gladys, you might land me your jacket, cap, and veil sometimes, and—and—if mamma came upon Rupert and me walking through the grounds, she would think it was you. Don't you see? Oh, it would be so romantic, Gladys! You must consent."

And, almost against her will and better judgment, the girl allowed the thoughtless, wilful heiress to persuade her to a step that she was to rue during the rest of her life.

"Are you with me or against me, Gladys?" she asked, wistfully, but with an irresistible smile.

No one could look into Gwendolen Melville's velvety dark eyes and refuse her anything she asked.

"I will do whatever you wish me," Gladys answered, faintly—adding, silently, to herself: "Surely no harm can come through it."

Ah! had Gladys Barton but known,—

"Look!" cried Gwen, suddenly giving her arm a squeeze. "There is Rupert Dane now! Look, Gladys, isn't he splendid! Could any girl help loving him, even though he is poor?"

Gladys Barton raised her eyes, and beheld the handsomest young man she had ever beheld in her life.

"What do you think of him?" asked the heiress, eagerly.

"I do not see how you could well help loving such a noble young man," replied Gladys in a low voice.

"Were you ever in love?" asked Gwen, curiously.

"No," replied Gladys, with a blush.

"You must be quite as old as I am," mused Gwen.

"I am eighteen," returned Gladys.

"Ah, well, you have plenty of time to meet your hero, yes," declared Gwen. "A young girl never knows what hour or what day she will meet her fate."

By this time they had reached the house, and hand in hand they entered together, and that was the first step in the cruellest tragedy that ever pen portrayed.

CHAPTER III.

RUPERT DANE demurred greatly when Gwen unfolded her plans to him late that afternoon.

"My darling, you are unkind," he declared, reproachfully. "You ought to know that it would be the hardest task I could undertake to pay attention to any other young girl and you about. No, no, Gwen, I cannot. I should be so intent on watching you. If I cannot be at your side talking to you, I would far rather be alone where I could at least be happy in giving my every thought to you."

"Foolish boy, to love me so well as that!" cried Gwen, delightedly.

It was nice to have so ardent, so earnest and devoted a lover.

But at length she wrung from him the promise that he would be attentive to Gladys for that length of time, providing she kept faithfully to her compact to come to him every morning—if but for a moment—in Gladys' jacket, cap, and veil, down by the big sycamore tree in the grounds.

He did not meet Gladys until evening.

While busy in his study one of the servants brought him a note from Gwen. There were but a few words; they ran as follows:—

"RUPERT,—

"Come to the library, and talk to Gladys. A number of friends of mine are here, and I fear she feels embarrassed and out of place among them."

"Gwen."

He went at once. He had expected to find in Gladys Barton, the miller's niece, an awkward, uncouth person. He was greatly surprised at the sweet, modest grace of the girl when Gwen introduced them, and he bowed very low over the slim, fluttering white hand that rested for an instant in his.

Gwen was obliged to leave them alone together, and turn her attention to her other guests, and, true to his promise to her, he did his best to make the time pass pleasantly for Gladys Barton.

As for Gladys, she never knew how it happened, but as she sat there in the mellow glow of the chandeliers, listening to the grand music that floated out to them from the adjoining room, with one question leading to another, she had told the handsome stranger by her side all of her simple history—a history so dark and so unutterably dreary for such a fair young girl that Rupert Dane listened in wonder.

Her parents had died in her early infancy, leaving Gladys alone in the world but for a grim old aunt, who received her with the greatest reluctance, and she had had a pitiful enough life of it ever since.

Rupert Dane looked thoughtfully down into the beautiful, girlish face, so sweet yet so unutterably sad, and told himself that he and Gwen would do their best to make Gladys Barton's two weeks' stay there a pleasant and memorable one to her.

He found the self-imposed task much easier than he anticipated, and he followed the rules Gwen had laid down, taking Gladys about; but experiencing none of the irksome feelings that he had anticipated. Indeed, it pleased him vastly to see how thoroughly he was making the girl enjoy her stay.

It was a great relief to him, too, to have someone to talk to about Gwen—someone whom he felt sure sympathized with Gwen and himself in their forlorn love affair.

It was a week that was never to be forgotten by Gladys Barton. At the end of it, when Gwen asked her how she was enjoying herself, she raised her shy, sweet face, and declared, blushing vividly, that it had been the happiest of her whole life.

Gwen's ruse completely misled her father, at least. Often during that week he would say to his wife,—

"You see, you were decidedly mistaken, my dear, about Gwendolen caring for my secretary. Why, the young fellow is deeply in love with Gladys Barton. Cecil St. John is of the same opinion; and, by the way, the poor fellow is

the Christmas ball, I made answer that if he could gain her consent to marry him, no one would be better pleased than myself. To speak plainly, I consented to Gwen's giving this ball purposely to bring this thing about. St. John will be down from London to-day, to remain until the week after the ball."

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"I do not believe he is so hard to win as mamma supposes. Why, if I ever read admiration in any man's eyes, I can read it in Cecil St. John's when he looks at me. I—"

"Gwen!" The name was uttered in a low, deep voice close by her side.

The girl sprang from the low velvet hassock on which she had flung herself, her face suffused with blushes.

"Is it you, Rupert!" she said. "How you frightened me!"

"I am so sorry, darling," he said, penitently. "I spoke to you twice, but you were thinking so deeply that you did not hear me. I saw you smile, and I almost prayed that you were thinking of me. Were you, Gwen?"

She looked up into the ardent face of her lover, and felt almost guilty to think her thoughts had been so far away from him.

Almost any other young girl's heart would have gone out to him, he was such a handsome, brave, bonny, young fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, with the tenderness and brownness of eyes, brown hair waving back from a splendid brow, and a brown moustache half-revealing, half-concealing a pair of firm, true lips.

"I have been watching you for five minutes, Gwen," he said. "A mad impulse seized me to kneel at your feet, kiss your white hands, and worship you; but I drew back with a sudden sense of fear. Oh, Gwen, are you sure you love me—sure that your heart will never change? Oh, Gwen, I often wonder how I have dared to love you—I, who am only your

father's secretary! Ah! how have I ever dared to love you, who are helpless to a million! What will be the end of this love-dream!"

CHAPTER II.

GWENDOLEN AND GLADYS.

"How will this love-dream of ours end, Gwen!" repeated Rupert Dane, huskily, his fair, handsome face paling a little, as he caught the girl's white hands, and looked eagerly, searchingly down into her beautiful face. "Have you ever thought what the end must be?"

"No," she said, hurriedly. "The present is so happy, I do not like to think of the future."

"But I think of it, Gwen," he said; "and the one thought forever uppermost in my mind is: if your parents find out that we love each other, they will try to separate us; and if they should by any chance succeed, it would kill the best part of me."

"How well you must love me, Rupert!" she said, nestling both little hands confidently in his.

"I wish I could tell you how much, dear," he whispered, with a little catch in his breath. "I wish I could do some valiant deed that would jeopardize my very life for your dear sake; you would see how gladly I would do it. But tell me, Gwen, what did your mother say to you about coming into the library last evening and seeing me holding your hand? Do not hesitate to tell me dear."

"I am sure she did not see it, Rupert, for I snatched my hand so quickly away from you when I heard the door open. If she had seen she would surely have mentioned it."

He looked greatly relieved. "I try to be very careful for your sake, dear," he said, gently; "but it seems to me the whole world must see in my face, whenever I am near you, how much I love—ay, worship you, my Gwen! Oh, if I were only rich, that I might go boldly to your father and mother and ask them for you; but to breathe one word of it now would mean separation for us. But we must manage to meet oftener, Gwen. When a whole day passes and I do not see you I am wretched. I sometimes wish you had a confidential companion by whom I could send notes to you at times. Do you know, dear, I have the uneasy fancy that Marie, your maid, is spying upon us! It is so hard to be obliged to meet secretly."

"Yes, it is too bad," returned Gwen, with a sigh; "but we have no other alternative, you see. We must meet secretly, or not at all. But I must leave you now, Rupert. There is the luncheon bell. Don't you hear it! Let go my hands."

"On one condition: remember we are engaged lovers, Gwen," he said, bending his fair, handsome head nearer her. "Can you not guess the condition?"

"If I guess it will you free my hand!" she cried, archly.

"Yes," he agreed, eagerly.

"Well, it is that—that some one must—kiss—"

"—you." "Exactly," he cried, gaily, freeing her hands instantaneously, and holding out his arms.

But with the quickness of a bird she flew past him, cluding his outstretched arms, with the blithest, merriest, most mischievous musical laugh that ever set a poor fellow's heart distracted.

"Oh, you cruel Gwen!" he cried. "But with the sound of that rippling laughter she was gone, and he was standing alone in the flital glow of the firelight."

"My bright, beautiful Gwen!" he mused. "Ah! Heaven, how I love her! How I shall strive for wealth for her dear sake; ay, as man has never before. What a cruel ordering of fate it is that some men have so much gold they hardly know what to do with it, while others toil like galley-slaves the best part of their lives and get barely enough to keep body and soul together!"

The young secretary went slowly back to the lawyer's study and applied himself very assiduously to the great pile of briefs lying before him.



on the desk. But it was no easy matter with a pair of dark, laughing eyes, and a lovely, dimpled rosebud face, that set his heart and brain in a whirl, floating between him and the pages.

"It is quite useless," he cried, at length, in despair, flinging down his pen, and catching up his hat. "I will take a little turn outside, and smoke a cigar."

Snuffing the action to the word, Rupert Dane was soon walking down the avenue, as the principal residence street of the picturesque town was called.

As he turned the first corner, a carriage dashed past him. He knew it was the Melville turnout, even before he glanced up; but with that swift glance his face flushed and his eyes kindled.

Gwen was in a back seat; beside her sat a fair young girl whose plain hat and jacket formed a striking contrast to those of the millionaire's petted daughter.

Rupert raised his hat with a low bow as the carriage with its occupants dashed past.

He was not surprised to see Gwen out so soon again.

She was like a swallow—here, there, everywhere in the shortest space of time; but he did wonder, as he walked briskly along, who the sweet-faced blue-eyed girl was who was with her.

When Gwen had left him she could not help but think during luncheon of the words he had said.

"I wish you had a companion whom we could both trust. I cannot help thinking Marie, your maid, is spying on us."

And at this critical time Marie had sent down word to Mrs. Melville and her daughter that her relatives had written for her to come home to spend the holidays, and if Miss Gwendolen could spare her just now she would dearly like to go.

Mrs. Melville's brows met in a deep frown as the butler delivered Marie's message, which she was too timid to deliver herself, and face Mrs. Melville's anger.

"Servants are always wanting to leave just when you have the most use for them," she declared, sharply. "You will need Marie until after the ball, Gwen. Why can she not stay until then?"

But as Gwen listened, a happy thought came to her all in an instant.

"Let Marie go by all means, mamma," she said, eagerly. "I shall get along very well without her, I am sure. I could get the miller's niece, Gladys Barton, to come to me as companion for the two weeks Marie will be absent."

"Well, suit yourself about it, my dear," returned Mrs. Melville.

So they settled it that if Gwen could get Gladys to come to her, Marie might get off by the afternoon train.

Gladys Barton was amazed when she saw the grand Melville carriage, with its prancing horses stop at her humble door, and more than amazed when she learned Miss Melville's errand.

"I shall be glad to go with you if aunt is willing," she said, raising her sweet, shy blue eyes to Gwen's face; adding earnestly: "I would do anything in this world for you, to try to repay you for your kindness to me last summer."

"Would you?" said Gwen, in a very low whisper.

"Yes," replied Gladys, earnestly.

And she wondered greatly what Miss Melville meant by the words,—

"I will put you to the test very soon."

Gladys' aunt raised no objection to the plan, and thus it was the girl soon found herself seated beside Gwen in the grand carriage, skimming swiftly over the ground for a fortnight's stay as Gwen's companion.

"We can talk very confidentially to each other on our way home," said Gwen.

"Yes," assented Gladys, but she wondered vaguely what Gwendolen Melville, the beautiful, proud young heiress, could have to say confidentially to her.

"I—I may as well come to the point at once, Gladys," said Gwen. "I want you to help me in a—love affair. There now, the worst is out."

"I help you in a love affair!" echoed Gladys.

"Oh, Miss Gwen, how could I ever do it!"

"To explain how you can help me, it is necessary that you should understand all about the matter. It is told in a few words. I—I have a lover, Gladys, and we love each other to distraction; but as he is poor, he would not dare ask papa for me. He is papa's secretary. If either of my parents knew of our love, he would be dismissed on the instant it was discovered, and then we should both surely die, because we would be separated. So you see how very careful we have to be in our conduct to each other before people."

"Yes," assented Gladys, her girlish sympathies fully enlisted.

"Rupert is the grandest fellow in the world, if he is poor," Gwen went on rapidly, "and the handsomest. When you see my mamma you will understand how useless it would be to ask her to sanction our love. I have heard her say, time and again, that she would rather see me laid in my grave than married to a man who was penniless. Papa is even worse than she is on this subject, though he is so rich. Rupert, as I have said before, has nothing. A miserly old uncle of his might take it into his head, when he is dying, to make him his heir; but ten chances to one he won't, for he does not like Rupert at all, owing to a quarrel they once had."

"You can imagine, Gladys, how hard it is for Rupert and me to get a chance to see each other. We used to take long rambles through the grounds in summer, but we cannot do that now. We were walking down the road on two occasions lately, when we came face to face with mamma, and, oh, Gladys, I am so terrified lest she suspects something. I love mamma dearly; but, oh, it would break my heart to give up my lover."

"And now, Gladys, I have come to the point where I can explain to you how you can help me. I will introduce you to Rupert, and he must pay great attention to you and take you about—to the matinees, to my ball, etc. That would, to use a common phrase, throw mamma completely off the track. And then, Gladys, you might lend me your jacket, cap, and veil sometimes, and—and—if mamma came upon Rupert and me walking through the grounds, she would think it was you. Don't you see? Oh, it would be so romantic, Gladys! You must consent."

And, almost against her will and better judgment, the girl allowed the thoughtless, wilful heiress to persuade her to a step that she was to rue during the rest of her life.

"Are you with me or against me, Gladys?" she asked, wistfully, but with an irresistible smile.

No one could look into Gwendolen Melville's velvety dark eyes and refuse her anything she asked.

"I will do whatever you wish me," Gladys answered, faintly—adding, silently, to herself: "Surely no harm can come through it."

Ah! had Gladys Barton but known,

"Look!" cried Gwen, suddenly giving her arm a squeeze. "There is Rupert Dane now! Look, Gladys, isn't he splendid? Could any girl help loving him, even though he is poor?"

Gladys Barton raised her eyes, and beheld the handsomest young man she had ever beheld in her life.

"What do you think of him?" asked the heiress, eagerly.

"I do not see how you could well help loving such a noble young man," replied Gladys in a low voice.

"Were you ever in love?" asked Gwen, curiously.

"No," replied Gladys, with a blush.

"You must be quite as old as I am," mused Gwen.

"I am eighteen," returned Gladys.

"Ah, well, you have plenty of time to meet your hero, yet," declared Gwen. "A young girl never knows what hour or what day she will meet her fate."

By this time they had reached the house, and hand in hand they entered together, and that was the first step in the cruellest tragedy that ever pen portrayed.

CHAPTER III.

RUPERT DANE demurred greatly when Gwen unfolded her plans to him late that afternoon.

"My darling, you are unkind," he declared, reproachfully. "You ought to know that it would be the hardest task I could undertake to pay attention to any other young girl and you about. No, no, Gwen, I cannot. I should be so intent on watching you. If I cannot be at your side talking to you, I would far rather be alone where I could at least be happy in giving my every thought to you."

"Foolish boy, to love me so well as that!" cried Gwen, delightedly.

It was nice to have so ardent, so earnest and devoted a lover.

But at length she wrung from him the promise that he would be attentive to Gladys for that length of time, providing she kept faithfully to her compact to come to him every morning—if but for a moment—in Gladys' jacket, cap, and veil, down by the big sycamore tree in the grounds.

He did not meet Gladys until evening.

While busy in his study one of the servants brought him a note from Gwen. There were but a few words; they ran as follows:—

"RUPERT,—

"Come to the library, and talk to Gladys. A number of friends of mine are here, and I fear she feels embarrassed and out of place among them."

He went at once. He had expected to find in Gladys Barton, the miller's niece, an awkward, uncouth person. He was greatly surprised at the sweet, modest grace of the girl when Gwen introduced them, and he bowed very low over the slim, fluttering white hand that rested for an instant in his.

Gwen was obliged to leave them alone together, and turn her attention to her other guests, and, true to his promise to her, he did his best to make the time pass pleasantly for Gladys Barton.

As for Gladys, she never knew how it happened, but as she sat there in the mellow glow of the chandeliers, listening to the grand music that floated out to them from the adjoining room, with one question leading to another, she had told the handsome stranger by her side all of her simple history—a history so dark and so unutterably dreary for such a fair young girl that Rupert Dane listened in wonder.

Her parents had died in her early infancy, leaving Gladys alone in the world but for a grim old aunt, who received her with the greatest reluctance, and she had had a pitiful enough life of it ever since.

Rupert Dane looked thoughtfully down into the beautiful, girlish face, so sweet yet so unutterably sad, and told himself that he and Gwen would do their best to make Gladys Barton's two weeks' stay there a pleasant and memorable one to her.

He found the self-imposed task much easier than he anticipated, and he followed the rules Gwen had laid down, taking Gladys about; but experiencing none of the irksome feelings that he had anticipated. Indeed, it pleased him vastly to see how thoroughly he was making the girl enjoy her stay.

It was a great relief to him, too, to have someone to talk to about Gwen—someone whom he felt sure sympathized with Gwen and himself in their forlorn love affair.

It was a week that was never to be forgotten by Gladys Barton. At the end of it, when Gwen asked her how she was enjoying herself, she raised her shy, sweet face, and declared, blushing vividly, that it had been the happiest of her whole life.

Gwen's ruse completely misled her father, at least. Often during that week he would say to his wife,—

"You see, you were decidedly mistaken, my dear, about Gwendolen caring for my secretary. Why, the young fellow is deeply in love with Gladys Barton. Cecil St John is of the same opinion; and, by the way, the poor fellow is

making very little headway in his suit for Gwen's favour; but I tell him not to be too precipitate in the matter—there's plenty of time."

"I am not so sure about Rupert Dane not caring for Gwen," returned Mrs. Melville, slowly. "I will wait and watch further before I shall change a carefully formed opinion."

"Women never will give up, even when they see they are fairly beaten," laughed Mr. Melville, as he turned away.

At length the night of the grand ball rolled round. A few moments before the guests arrived, Gwen sent for Rupert Dane again. He responded with alacrity. When he opened the door of the drawing-room he was conscious that there were two figures standing in the fitful glow of the fire-light at the further end; but he saw only one—the slim, graceful figure and tropical face of Gwen, towards whom he advanced with a flushed face and trembling, outstretched hands.

"Remember, Rupert," said Gwen, drawing Gladys out of the shadows, "you are to be Gladys' partner, or secure partners for her for every dance. I have promised her a royal time to-night."

He managed to get a word or two alone with Gwen, just as she was quitting the room.

"Promise me I shall have at least one waltz with you, Gwen, darling," he urged; "and promise me, too, that you will not give one dance to that insolent St. John, who is for ever hanging about you. I have only one fault, Gwen, dear, and that is jealousy, deep and horrible. If I should see you waltzing with St. John I should feel like killing him; I could not endure it, Gwen."

"I cannot be so rude as to refuse Mr. St. John, if he asks for three or four waltzes," declared Gwen; adding, "and I may as well tell you the truth, I have already arranged to open the ball with him as my partner."

Rupert Dane turned away with a very pale face, saying no more.

When Gladys Barton entered the grand ball-room, leaning on his arm, she caught her breath with a cry of delight.

"Oh, Mr. Dane!" she gasped, "it seems like fairyland or a—glimpse of Heaven!"

He smiled at her ardent delight. To him there was nothing out of the common in the banks of roses, the palms, and waving ferns, the dazzling chandeliers, and the brilliant costumes of the throng of bewitchingly pretty young girls.

"A young girl's first ball must seem a glimpse of fairy-life," he answered, with a smile. "Those that follow never seem quite so nice."

"I shall always remember you, Mr. Dane, when I think of my first ball," she said, impulsively, raising a pair of great, blue, serious eyes to his, and clasping her little hands together as she went on slowly; "I am quite sure this will be my last and only one—no one will ever take me to a ball again."

The hours that followed seemed like a bewildering dream to poor, pretty Gladys Barton. Over and over again she told herself how greatly she was enjoying herself, and how she wished that she could dance on and on with Mr. Dane for ever and ever.

"I fear you are growing tired of me, Gladys," said Rupert, at length. "I must find you a better partner. You will like that."

She stopped quite still, and looked at him with shining eyes.

"No, no; let me dance with you to the very last, Mr. Dane," she murmured, bravely keeping back a sob from her voice. "Do not spoil my happiness."

He smiled, thinking her too shy to care to dance with a stranger. But with Gladys it was different.

The bare possibility of losing him for the rest of the evening had brought to the girl a sudden awakening to a startling secret. During the week in which she had been thrown so constantly into Rupert Dane's company she had learned, all unconsciously, to love him—a woman's heritage of love had come to her. She had seen no one in her young life like him.

Yes, Gladys Barton had learned to love him with all the deep, romantic passion of her girlish heart.

With youth, love is not a plant of slow growth—the glance of an eye, the touch of a hand, a smile, a tender word, often lights the flame of a deathless love.

In striving to be kind to Gladys for Gwen's sake, and to make her stay with them happy, Rupert Dane had, all unwittingly, gained the girl's love.

Alas! for poor Gladys. She was deeply in love with him. Life would never be the same to her again.

As for Rupert Dane, he had never passed a more desolate evening. Wherever Gwen was his wistful eyes were following her. It was cruel, he told himself, to be so near, and yet so far from her, and he wished a score of times most heartily that the tiresome ball were over. He was getting desperately jealous, too, of the attention St. John was paying Gwen.

It was over at last, and a very tired girl was Gwen as she sat in her boudoir with Gladys, half an hour later.

"How did you like the ball, Gladys?" she asked; and she looked at the girl in wonder as she saw her burst into tears.

"Oh, so much!" she sobbed; "and ever since we came up to your room I have been trying to tell you something, Miss Gwen. Please don't be angry with me; but I—I cannot stay the two weeks out. I—I must go back to my humble home and—and my old life to-morrow."

"Nonsense!" returned Gwen, yawning sleepily, as she laid her dark, curly head back against the crimson velvet cushion. "You must stay until Marie returns, at least. You know how useful you are in lending me your cloak and veil to meet Rupert in the grounds. We cannot spare you, Gladys."

Long after sleep closed Gwen's eyelids, Gladys Barton stood motionless at the window, gazing out with great dry, burning eyes at the bright golden stars that gilded the skies overhead.

"Oh, Heaven!" she sobbed out at length, holding out her arms to the glimmering stars, with a great stifled cry, "is it just, is it fair, that she should have everything and I nothing! She has wealth, beauty, and the heart of the only man whom I could ever love, and I have nothing but poverty and a breaking heart. I cry out again to Heaven—is it fair?"

But no voice from the night's skies answered her. It was hours before sleep came to the blue eyes drowned in such hopeless tears, and even then she lived over again in her dreams the happy hours she had spent at the ball with handsome, courteous Rupert Dane.

Nothing could shake Gladys' determination to leave the next morning, and despite Gwen's entreaties and anger, she was obliged to see Gladys depart for home.

A week dragged its slow length by tediously enough. The old life was dreary enough before, but it was a thousand times more dreary now to the girl.

There is nothing more pitiful than the knowledge to a young girl that she has given the great priceless treasure of her heart unasked, and to a man who does not care for it, and to whom she will be nothing—ah, Heaven, nothing!—while they both live. No wonder the angels in Heaven are said to weep over the hopeless love of women.

Long hours after Gladys took her bit of candle and walked slowly up to her attic room to bed, she would stand for hours looking drearily out over the white stretch of road, always thinking of him who would cross her lonely path never again—never again, she thought. But fate works wonders.

As she gazed wearily from the window late one night she saw a solitary horseman dash swiftly up the road, and when directly opposite the cottage draw reins as he caught sight of her standing there in the clear bright moonlight, and motion to her to open the window.

Gladys silently and wonderingly obeyed, asking herself who the man could possibly be, and what he could want at that late hour of the night.

"Gladys!" called an eager voice, which sent the blood coursing madly through her veins, and which she would have recognised even if it had called from the other end of the world.

"Is that you, Mr. Dane?" she called, wonderingly.

"Sh! Not so loud, Gladys. Yes, it is I. Can you come down where I am for one little moment? I cast my all upon the hope of seeing you. Heaven has surely answered my prayer!"

All unmindful of the bitter consequences which were to accrue from it, Gladys took down a heavy shawl from a peg close by, and wrapping it about her, stole quietly through the cottage and out of the house, little dreaming that it would be long years ere she crossed that threshold again.

"Gladys," said Rupert Dane, as he leaped quickly from the saddle, and throwing the reins over the gate-post, turned to greet her.

But she drew back, her hands trembling too violently to dare risk them in his clasp, as he might discover her agitation.

"Gladys," he said, sadly, "I thought you were my true friend. Have you forgotten our compact of friendship so soon?"

"No," she said, with something very like a sob in her voice, "I have not forgotten, Mr. Dane. You—you must always think of me as the—as one of the truest friends you have in the whole wide world."

"I am going to put your friendship to a great test, Gladys," he said, huskily, reaching forth and grasping her hand eagerly as he spoke. "Will it stand a great test?"

"Yes," she answered, promptly, in a low voice.

For a moment there was a most profound silence between them.

Ah! how handsome he looked as he stood there in the clear bright moonlight!

"But I must not think of him," Gladys whispered to herself; "he is Gwen's lover—his love is not for me."

"You must take a solemn vow first, Gladys, never to reveal what I have to tell you, and never to mention that you saw me here to-night. You must speak quickly. Ah, Heaven! Gladys, every moment is precious—more precious than drops of my heart's blood!"

He buried his face in his hands with a deep groan, and she saw his strong frame tremble like a leaf in the wind.

There was the sound of the swift clashing of horses' hoofs in the distance. He heard it, and his face grew as ghastly as death as he raised it from his hands with a low cry of horror.

"Is it yes or no, Gladys?" he cried out, sharply, in an awful whisper. "Will you take an oath never to betray me?"

Nearer and nearer came the sound of the galloping hoofs.

"I will take my oath," whispered Gladys, with chattering teeth. "In life or in death I will never betray you."

And those words decided poor Gladys Barton's fate.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR one brief moment after Rupert Dane ceased speaking, he and Gladys Barton stood looking into each other's pale face in utter silence.

No sound broke the terrible stillness save the rustling of the dead leaves as the wind swept them around and around the snow-covered ground, and the violent beating of the girl's heart as she listened to those rapidly advancing horses' hoofs sounding each moment nearer and nearer in the distance.

"Gladys," said Dane, huskily, impulsively seizing both of the girl's cold little hands in his, "you have bound yourself by as solemn a vow as woman's lips have ever uttered never to betray my presence here to-night, or that you have seen me, or one word of what I have to say to you."

She nodded dumbly.

"What I have to tell you must be told quickly," he went on hoarsely; "and, Gladys, I have staked my all upon the belief that you would stand my true friend, and aid me in this affair."

She raised her fair, sweet, colourless face, and looked at him.

"I would do anything in this world to help you," she said in a low, unsteady voice.

If she had uttered the words that her heart prompted, she would have added,—

"I would give my life if it could help you!"

He must have been blind not to have read the girl's secret in her drooping face. His heart was too full of love for Gwen to give another even a passing thought.

By this time a handsome carriage drawn by a pair of spirited horses was abreast of them, and to Gladys' great astonishment, the driver drew rein at a signal from Rupert Dane.

"Have no fear, Gladys," he said, smiling, as he noted her consternation. The man has met me here by appointment. I have a long ride before me to-night, and for reasons which I will explain to you later. I decided that it would be best for the man to take the carriage down the road instead of bringing it here."

By this time the man had turned the team over to Dane, and taking charge of the horse he had ridden, vaulted into the saddle, and was soon speeding back towards the village again.

"Gladys," said her companion, quickly, noting at last how she was shivering, "will you get into the carriage? It will be more agreeable than standing here in the cold. I will walk the horses up and down while we talk."

She hesitated, and drew back, and he saw a great wave of crimson pass over her startled face.

"Gladys," he added, hastily, "if you object to that arrangement, please allow me to at least place one of the robes down here for you to stand on to make you more comfortable while we converse."

"I suppose it would be better to get into the carriage, and drive up and down out of the range of my aunt's windows. If she were to see me talking to you here she would be very angry," she replied.

He helped her into the vehicle without another word; but it was some moments, as they drove along, ere he opened the subject which was preying upon his mind.

"I might as well make a clean breast of the whole affair to you, as you are the mutual friend of Gwen and myself," he said, desperately, at length. "The fact is, I have had a bitter quarrel with St. John. You remember him, Gladys, the fellow who hangs about here, and who is so madly in love with my Gwen."

"I remember him," she said.

"I was at the club to-night when he came in," continued Rupert, "and at the first glance I saw that he had been taking too much wine. I would have passed him by without recognition; but, noting my intention, he sprang insolently forward and barred my passage."

"Ah! what airs we do put on for an humble secretary!" he cried, tauntingly. "No doubt you have used them skilfully as a passport to pretty Gwen's favour," he added, with a sneering laugh.

"In an instant every drop of blood in my body seemed turned to fire. I felt like chastising him on the spot."

"Do not mention her name here!" I said, sternly. "I will not permit it."

"You?" he retorted, with an uproarious laugh. "What have you got to say about it, pray? I shall talk of the lovely Gwendolen as much as I please and where I please. Here!" he cried to a passing waiter, "bring on champagne—plenty of it for the crowd—and we'll drink to the beauty of the village, the lovely Gwendolen Melville—to her bright eyes and her rosy lips and—"

"Out flew my right arm, and I felled him to the floor. I almost wish I had killed him. By a terrible effort I controlled my wrath sufficiently to turn on my heel and walk hurriedly from the place."

"But, livid with rage, St. John had sprung to his feet, and yelled these words as a parting shot after me:

"To-night's work will cost you dear, my fine secretary! You shall be discharged from Mr. Melville's employ to-morrow. I have influence enough with him for that. And, furthermore,

I swear that within a fortnight I shall be Miss Melville's betrothed lover!"

"I could not trust myself to turn back. I should hardly have been responsible for what I should have done to him, my rage was so great. That he will succeed in getting me discharged from Mr. Melville's employ I have not the least doubt, and that means to be separated from Gwen, and this I cannot endure. I want you to go to her, Gladys, tell her all that has happened, and say to her for me there is but one way that will prevent them from effectually parting us, and that is for her to marry me at once. Tell her, Gladys, that she holds the happiness of my future in her white hands. Plead with her, do your best for me, Gladys, and I shall bless you to the last day of my life. We could go over to Ourtown and have the ceremony performed. The train leaves at five in the morning—long before it is daylight—and I will have the carriage at the park gates waiting for her. Give her this letter—it explains everything—and bring me her answer, late as it will be. Will you undertake the mission?"

Gladys Barton listened like one in a horrible dream. Why had Heaven willed it that he should confide in her? It was more bitter, more cruel than the pangs of death to hear him say so eagerly:

"You must tell her how I love her, Gladys—that I love her with all my heart and soul. I love my darling Gwen so well I would die for her. Tell her I will devote my life to her; that I will do everything to make her happy; that I will worship her!"

Gladys Barton's lips slowly whitened. Every word seemed to stab her to the heart. The snowy hills, the dark pines, the horses skimming over the white ground, and the eager face of her companion seemed floating around her. Then the darkness of death seemed to shut out the fair beauty of the moonlit night.

"You hesitate, Gladys!" he said, reproachfully. "Surely you agree with me that all is fair in love and war!"

The girl drew her breath as if with a sharp, sudden pain, and aroused herself with a mighty effort to answer him.

Her heart was crushed; hope and love lay in ruins around her; but he to whom she had given her heart unasked, he who was another's lover, must not know this.

It was hard to sit there calmly and hear the man she loved tell how he worshipped Gwen Melville, the beautiful heiress.

"You do not answer me, Gladys," he said, anxiously. "Surely, if you are my friend, you will not refuse!"

While he had been speaking the girl had gradually grown calmer.

"I—I will do what I can for you," she said, faintly. "I will help you to happiness—if it is in my power."

"You are an angel!" he cried, gratefully, his handsome, brown eyes glowing.

It was a twenty minutes' drive from the miller's cottage to the Melville mansion, and Rupert Dane turned his horses' heads in that direction at once when he had gained Gladys' consent.

"I will wait for you here," he said, as he handed her out of the carriage, which he had driven close to the rear entrance to the grounds.

"I will return as soon as possible," she answered.

As she hurried up the broad paved walk, the clock in an adjacent tower struck ten in loud, measured strokes.

She shivered, and passed on to the rear entrance. It would never do to go up those grand marble steps and ring the bell at that hour.

In answer to her timid knock Mrs. Redmond, the housekeeper, responded.

"Oh, is it you, Gladys Barton?" she said, surprisedly. "Why, we were just about to send for you. Miss Gwendolen was ill with a headache all the evening, and wanted you. But how did you know of it?"

"Perhaps somebody came for me," returned Gladys, hurrying past her and on into the lower corridor.

She encountered no one on her way to Gwen's room, and for this she was very thankful. She

knocked timidly, and a very stifled "come in," in Gwen's voice, responded. As the door was ajar, Gladys pushed it open and entered.

The sight that met her view quite alarmed her. On a velvet divan in an alcove, with her curly head buried in the cushions, lay Gwen, the petted heiress, sobbing as though her heart would break.

"Oh! is it you, Gladys!" she sobbed. "I was just thinking about you—just wishing for you. No young girl in the world was ever in such trouble as I am. Come and sit down by me; I must make a confidante of somebody or I shall die! It's all about that Cecil St. John," continued Gwen, between her sobs; "he asked papa if he might marry me—mind you, he did not think it worth his while to consult me about it. After he went, papa came up here to talk with me about it. I told him that I wouldn't marry Cecil St. John to save his life."

"There must be another lover in the way!" he said, furiously; "if so, I shall take good care to nip anything of that kind in the bud. I have received a telegram that takes me over to London at once—I start Thursday next. This is Tuesday. I will give you that length of time to consider St. John's suit. If you still persist in refusing, I shall take you along with me and put you in charge of your Aunt Mary; she will take all the romantic nonsense out of you in six months' time," he added, grimly.

"From my earliest infancy I have always had a horror of my father's sister, Mary Graham; she is principal of a young ladies' seminary in the suburbs of London. I would just as soon be sent to prison as to that place. Oh! what will Rupert and I do? Can't you suggest something, Gladys? I have tried to see Rupert to tell him, but he is not to be found."

"I have just come from him," said Gladys, drawing the letter from her pocket; adding in a low, choking voice; "You are to read it at once, Gwen, and I am to carry your answer back to him."

(To be continued.)

A TERRIBLE MISTAKE

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a very quiet wedding; the bride alighted at the church door with an elderly friend who was to play the part of parent, her own father having refused to fill that office; her bridesmaid was the friend's little daughter, aged eight, who was neatly and prettily dressed in brocade.

The bride herself wore a simply-made dress of some neutral tint. She did not seem much embarrassed or very nervous, which, perhaps, was owing chiefly to the fact that the church was empty save for the clerk, two laundresses and a child.

As she stepped upon the pavement she shivered, for it was a foggy morning in December; the snow lay thick upon the ground, and the streets had not had time to clear, being only half-past eight. She glanced round as if expecting to see some familiar face; it was at that moment that a voice said, "Barbara!" She turned swiftly.

"Father!" and a glad look leapt into her eyes.

The man leant towards her and kissed her coldly. "Good-bye," he said, and it seemed to her that he had merely come to emphasize his utter renunciation of her. For a moment her lips quivered, and a wild impulse seized her to cry out to him to be as he had once been to her, but it was only for a moment. She quickly recovered herself, and laying her hand upon her companion's arm walked up the church.

The bridegroom, quite unattended, waited for her at the altar; he was a tall, dark young fellow,

and in his manner there was more visible emotion than in hers. Perhaps he thought how much she was giving up for his sake—home and friends, all dear and early associations; perhaps he feared he could never recompense her for that sacrifice—for it was a bitter sacrifice. She had loved them all so truly, had been so wishful to assist or comfort in any time of trouble, had done her best (however poor that best might be) to be a help and not a burden.

As he clasped her hand in greeting he looked anxiously into her face, as if he feared to find some trace of regret there; but her lips smiled back at him, and her eyes met his steadily.

Then the clergyman made his appearance, and the ceremony began. The bride's voice was low but firm, and the laundresses were a trifle disappointed that she did not shed any of the conventional tears.

It was soon ended, the words "I, Barbara, take thee, Nugent," &c., had been spoken; the ring shone upon her hand, and they were made one till death should them part. She had written her maiden name for the last time, "Barbara Morris," and now she walked down the church aisle on her husband's arm, and the laundresses pressed nearer to have a better view of her face; the next moment the little company had stepped into the fly and were driven away, leaving the clerk and the two women to speculate about the reason for this extremely unpretentious wedding.

The young couple drove straight to the pretty home it had been Nugent Cameron's pride and joy to make for his darling. There was to be no wedding tour—no fashionable and expensive breakfast. Both had decided their means would not justify such an outlay as either would necessitate; but a substantial yet dainty meal had been prepared for them by a lady-friend of the bride, who now waited in the hall to greet her by her new name and give her welcome.

It was a happy if not a large party that sat down at the well-spread table, in the centre of which stood a huge wedding-cake, the one piece of extravagance in which they had indulged. The friend who had given the bride away, and whose name was Mayton, enlivened the time by comical anecdotes, and queer events he had known in his travels; Mrs. Harman teased and petted the bride alternately.

Later on songs were sung, games played, and when evening came, Mr. Mayton, sitting in an easy chair, amused them with his guitar, on which he played accompaniments to his songs.

The next day Nugent returned to his work—he was a jeweller—and Barbara gave music-lessons as calmly as though no change had taken place in her life. She did not feel lonely in the days that followed—her time was so fully occupied from morning till night; the maid was so young, and, withal, so thoughtless, that much of her work fell to Barbara's share; then she had her pupils, so that no minute in her day was wasted.

Her work was not interrupted either by visitors, for her friends had one and all tacitly combined to ignore her existence. She had given great offence by daring to choose her husband for herself; and her parents regarded her choice with most unfavourable eyes. They thought with her talent she should have done far better; in fact, had decided that she should marry Laurence Carden, a man of property; and when they heard that she had accepted Nugent Cameron, a working jeweller, they were very properly disgusted, and her mother had declared that her daughter's husband should never cross her threshold.

It seemed not a little hard to Barbara that she should be made the scapegoat of the family; three of her brothers had married decidedly against their parents' wishes, but all of the wives had afterwards been received and treated with greatest kindness. The elder Morris had a peculiar way of objecting to any alliance formed by one of the family, but in the case of one son their objection was not without cause.

He had chosen to marry the illiterate daughter of a betting-man; but she had played her cards so well, had so pandered to the tastes and wishes of her husband's relatives, that she was now in

high favour with them; might come and go at will, where Nugent Cameron was forbidden to enter.

Those first few months of Barbara's wedded life were very happy ones despite her separation from her friends, upon which she strove her best not to dwell; not a thought of coming trouble disturbed her peace, no presentiment of future ill warned her "that joy is not," though "love of joy shall be."

But one day, when she sat alone, the maid brought a letter to her; she flushed as she looked at the handwriting, recognising it as Laurence Carden's, and wondered not a little what motive he had for thus addressing her. She broke the seal and read the few lines with knitted brow and compressed lips. The note contained an urgent request for a meeting, and begged that the writer's request should be kept secret even from her husband, because the matter he wished to communicate concerned her brother William—the one who had married the betting-man's daughter. Laurence added that William was in great danger, and he alone could save him, and that he would do so for the sake of old days.

Barbara knew by bitter experience what a careless, unprincipled creature her brother was; many a deed of his had brought the blush to her cheek, a ashamed look into her great grey eyes; and now her heart beat fast with fear lest this, his last escapade, should bring disgrace upon those who had the misfortune to call him son or brother.

She folded the note with a little sigh; it seemed to her that even now, when her friends had cast her off, their troubles and misfortunes followed her still to mar the peace of her new life.

All that day she went about listlessly; Nugent missed the sound of her gay voice singing, noticed the utter absence of cheerfulness with anxious eyes; but to all his inquiries she declared herself quite well, and only a trifle tired by the stupidity of her pupils.

The next morning she was so obviously restless and ill at ease that he questioned her closely, but could elicit nothing satisfactory, and went to business in an uncomfortable frame of mind. There a note awaited him, written evidently in a feigned hand.

It ran:—

"If you have any regard for your wife's good name you will prevent her daily meetings with Laurence Carden. Go to the Botanic Gardens at 2.30 to-day, and you will see the writer has not warned you without a cause."

At any other time Nugent would have treated this anonymous communication with supreme contempt; but now, coupling it with Barbara's manner, he could not wholly disregard it, try as he would. And as the slow hours wore on, the dread in his heart, lest he should find her false, grew and grew, until it assumed gigantic dimensions. "Trifles light as air" confirmed that fear; words that had seemed innocent now took a double meaning; each time he had found her depressed since their marriage was recalled, and to himself he said, "She was grieving for him, not for her parents." Yet why should she, loving Laurence, have married him? That he could not understand. Was it in a fit of pique, or from sheer opposition to her parents' wishes?

At first he said he would not put his fear and distrust to the test—that he would not spy upon Barbara's movements; but then came the reflection that unless he satisfied himself that the news received was a malicious libel, he would never be able to place confidence in his wife again, and that with his falling trust his love would die.

Yes, he would go; and if the writer had lied he should never rest until he had found him out, and made him eat his own words; he would confess all to Barbara, and pray her forgiveness for his unworthy doubts.

Tired and jaded he returned to the early dinner, and found Barbara dressed as if for walking, with the exception of her hat and gloves. He made some comment upon this, and she answered, with

forced lightness, that she had an engagement to keep early in the afternoon, and so had prepared for it.

His heart beat madly, and he longed to cry out that he knew all, to beseech her, by her old love, to show him some compassion. Whatever anger he had felt when first he read the anonymous note was swallowed up in anguish; he even felt a sort of pity for her that she should so have mistaken her heart, so have fallen from the pedestal upon which he had placed her.

Dinner ended he rose, and said he was returning to business. She remarked that he was in a great hurry to go; but he thought she seemed relieved.

He passed an arm about her, and lifting her face in his hollowed palm, looked into the dear eyes he had believed so true with such hopeless yearning and regret that she was startled, and clung about him tearfully. He thought remorse for her deception held her so silent, brought that pallor to her face, and he caught her closer with a half cry.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" she asked, after awhile, and he felt she trembled in every limb.

"I was wondering," he said, slowly, "if ever, in your secret heart, you have regretted giving yourself to me—if ever at any time your love will die out!"

"No, no," she answered; but her voice was so faint that it carried no confirmation with it, unless it were of her guilt.

He set her free, and saying good-bye turned to leave her. She followed him, and taking his hand in hers, fondled it with her fingers as she spoke.

"Why are you so strange!" she asked. "Have I made you angry?"

"No," he answered, dreamily, "I am not angry."

Oh! if he had only spoken out then, or if she had dared to tell him her secret, how much misery might have been spared them both! What anguish of love and regret might have been averted!

But the opportunity passed, and kissing her once upon the mouth he left her, and, going out, bent his steps towards the Botanic Gardens. He secured a splendid "colony of vantage"; himself sheltered from sight by yews, he yet commanded a view of the whole grounds.

At first they were deserted, but presently nursemaids with their charges began to flock in; then one or two couples of lovers, and at last the man for whom he was watching.

Nugent's heart beat thick and heavily, his hard-drawn breaths sounded like groans, and his face, white and distorted, looked suddenly pinched and old. Then he caught the flutter of a woman's garments, and by the colour and make he recognised them as Barbara's; by her gait and the glistering of her yellow-brown hair he would have been sure of her identity at even a greater distance.

"Oh, Heaven!" he said, and hid his face in his hands, and when he dared to look again, Laurence and she were together. He saw the former draw out some papers and give them to his wife; even at a distance he could mark her entreating gestures. Was she pleading this man to have mercy upon her, to leave her in peace? Did her marriage vows rise up to reproach her?

Then a wild impulse seized him to rush out and confront them, to strike down his rival at his feet, never to quit his hold of him until one of them lay dead. But Barbara! what could he say to her! How could he look upon her shamed face, into her guilty eyes! No, no; let her never guess that he knew her for what she was. In his great love, in his compassion for her fallen state, he would spare her all reproach; what blame there was should be his through all the days to come, and, perhaps, in later years she would learn to appreciate his sacrifice at its due worth, and, learning this, yearn for him, stretch out entreating hands to him.

He did not believe she could sin easily. He did not think she would ever succeed in lulling her conscience to sleep.

He wanted to see no more; so wearily, heavily,

like one who has done with hope and joy for ever, he turned and left the garden. He went back to his place of business, where he was highly esteemed for his steadiness and skill.

His employer exclaimed at his intense pallor, and the sudden look of extreme illness.

"You should rest this afternoon, Cameron," he said, kindly. "We can better afford to lose you for a few hours than for days."

"I was going to ask you for leave of absence. I am totally incapable of work."

So he went back to his home, and each step he took his resolve grew firmer. He would go away—leave her free of his loathed presence; perhaps when he was gone she would think more kindly of him, she might even come to regret his loss—to wish for his return. But he scarcely hoped so much.

The little maid-servant looked surprised at his entrance, but he gave no explanation. He walked up to his room and put a few things together in a travelling-bag, wrote a few lines to Barbara, and went downstairs again. He took very little money with him, although he had saved a fair sum before his marriage in anticipation of a rainy day. He was glad now that he had done so, because he would have his wife removed beyond the fear of immediate want; and then she had her pupils. Doubtless when he was gone she would return to her new friends. Had not her heart hankered for them ever since she had given herself to him?

"Tell your mistress I shall not be home to-night," he said to the wondering maid. Then he closed the door softly behind him, and so left the house that love had once made so fair.

Meanwhile Barbara lingered in the garden with Laurence Carden; she looked terribly fagged and white; there was shame and anguish in her clear grey eyes, a restlessness in her manner wholly foreign to it, and now and again she clasped and unclasped her hands in nervous agitation.

"Surely," she said, speaking with an evident effort,—"surely you will not proceed to extreme measures; exposure would break my father's heart."

"It rests with you whether I prosecute or no," the man answered, in clear, cold tones. "As you are well aware, William's offence is a grave one. If I overlook it I want something in return for my clemency."

"What is it? Believe me, if it is in my power you shall have it."

"You can give it me. I ask your friendship only."

She regarded him with a swift, suspicious glance.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, upon my honour."

"Then," impulsively, "it is yours. How can I withhold it from you after such great kindness? Mr. Cameron will wonder at the sudden change in my feeling towards you—yours to me. What shall I tell him?"

"Nothing of William's transgression. He might wish he had not formed any alliance with a family so unfortunate as to claim William as a member (my words sound cruel), but I am regarding this affair from a man's point of view. Let him believe I have seen the folly of my former hopes, and having conquered my unlucky love—still have such esteem for you that I desire your friendship. As a generous man he will not prohibit that."

She sighed wearily; her heart was strangely heavy although she had but just saved her brother from the punishment his sin deserved.

"I must be going now," she said. "Believe me, I am very grateful to you for your goodness, although my words sound so faint and cold. What you have told me about William has made me very, very miserable."

"Pray dispense all thoughts of him from your mind," and Laurence Carden glanced eagerly round as if seeking for some one; but only a solitary old maid, intent upon her book, presented herself to his view. For a moment his face wore a disappointed expression, at which Barbara faintly wondered. Then he lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it.

She drew her fingers gently yet quickly from his clasp.

"Good-bye," she said; "you have been most kind to me and mine."

"But when may I see you again? Do you walk here every day?"

"I shall not do so in future," with a sudden accession to frigidity. "If you wish to see me it must be at my own home and in my husband's presence. Understand, this is the first, and Heaven helping me, shall be the last secret interview I hold with you or anyone. I love him so well that my duty towards him is also my delight."

Laurence could hardly suppress an exclamation of anger, and only the reflection that all things come to him who waits, prevented him from plainly showing his mortification. He bowed very low as he answered,—

"It shall be my pleasure too, to obey you in all things."

"And you will let William know your decision. I shall be glad too if you will make him understand I do not wish to see him—at least, not yet; I am afraid I might speak some bitter truths."

So, with scarcely a word of farewell, she left him, and he watched the slim figure moving wearily away, with a sardonic smile upon his handsome face.

"If Nugent Cameron had seen nothing, yet I have sown seeds of distrust in his mind, and if I once get the *entrée* of their house I shall be successful. Love and revenge are sweet, and I will forego neither."

He lingered some time on the green and shady walks, plotting and planning to encompass Barbara's ruin and his own desire. He told himself he was so much in earnest he could not fail, and this thought brought him consolation.

Nursemaids and their charges looked wonderingly into the brooding, handsome face, the deep, saturnine eyes, and the little ones drew away from him as he passed with instinctive distrust.

But he was heedless of all; and conscious only of his intense thirst for revenge, his passionate, hungering love for this woman who was another man's wife.

At last he turned towards his chambers, intending to remain within them until he heard from his ally and confederate, the dissolute, unprincipled, graceless villain, William Moritz. In thought he followed Barbara Cameron to her home, and pictured to himself a stormy interview between husband and wife, in which Barbara would hotly resent Nugent's accusations or insinuations.

But as we know he was very wide of the mark.

The young wife entered the house with that same jaded look upon her pale face, that same air of repression which had first roused Nugent's anxiety and suspicion. In the hall the maid, eager to impart her news, met her.

"If you please, ma'am, master's took his bag and gone out; he told me to say he shouldn't be home to-night."

Her heart was faint and cold within her; a vague, yet awful fear held her quiet for a moment. When she spoke her voice was so low that the girl could scarcely hear her words.

"I suppose he has been called away on business. Well, we must pass the time as best we can in his absence, Ann."

Then she crept upstairs, and a little later on Ann heard a low, wild cry, followed by a heavy fall. She rushed upstairs, bursting unceremoniously into the room. There on the floor lay Barbara in all her pretty finery; her face rigid and white as death itself, her slim hands clenched; and not a pulse in her body appearing to beat. Ann knelt down, crying and talking, shrieking on her mistress to speak; and at last grew so alarmed that she rushed into a neighbouring house, and begged the mistress of it to come in.

"Oh!" she said, "mistress is took so bad; leastways, I believe she is dead. Oh! whatever shall I say to master when he comes home! Oh dear! oh dear! what shall I do? I daren't stay alone, along with her."

The neighbour was a sensible matter-of-fact woman, so she took her bag and went to the

"Be quiet," she said, sternly. "As you are now you are worse than useless; take me to your mistress. I dare say she is only in a swoon; she looks rather delicate."

Together they went into Barbara's room, and found her still lying white and rigid upon the floor. The woman, Mrs. Merton, instantly began to apply remedies and restoratives, but it was very long before the set mouth relaxed, or the woful grey eyes opened to the light of day. With a long-drawn, shuddering sigh, Barbara came back to life and pain; she looked vacantly at her new acquaintance, then, sitting up, began with feeble, trembling fingers to push the heavy, bright hair from her face. Next she found voice to thank Mrs. Merton for her kindly attentions.

"I am ashamed to give you so much trouble. I—I can't think what made me faint; I never did such a thing before. Perhaps I walked too far, and the day is warm."

"You're looking far from well," the other returned; "if you take my advice you will send for your husband or friends."

"My husband is away, and I don't wish to alarm my friends. I shall do very well now, thank you," and as she seemed to wish to be alone Mrs. Merton left her, promising "to look in again at night."

Then Barbara looked the door, and, drawing out a slip of paper she had contrived to conceal in her pocket before she fell senseless she read its few words again, as one who doubted whether she read aright.

"It is best for both that I should go. I have failed to make you happy, but Heaven knows you cannot deplore that failure so deeply as I. That I have loved you, and still love you, you will not doubt, although my conduct now seems to give the lie to my words. We can no longer remain together—your own heart will tell you why."

"I have taken very little money with me; I leave you all I can. And when I have found work to do I will forward you such remittances as I am able. Heaven knows I never loved you so dearly as now when I am leaving you, and if I have ever made one moment sweet to you, given you one precious memory, pray for me—pray, too, for my sake, that we may never meet again."

She could not understand his words, but it seemed to her they implied grave doubt of her fidelity and love, and, shuddering, she hid her face in her hands, while vainly she tried to pray.

CHAPTER II.

It is after years, when she remembered the anguish of that night, Barbara wondered she retained her reason. The voice in her heart cried with ceaseless iteration for Nugent—always Nugent; her ears were deaf to all other sounds; her aching eyes strove to pierce through the darkness, as though she yet hoped they might see his returning figure. But day dawned at last, and through her open windows came the subtle odours of numberless flowers, all the warmth and light of a May morning.

She lay upon her bed, silent and motionless, watching the fleecy clouds scudding across the sky, following with incurious glance the zig zag flight of a yellow butterfly. She seemed stupefied by the long hours of agonising, silent despair, for she felt that Nugent had spoken truly when he said she was to pray they might never meet again.

"I shall not see him any more," she repeated again and again, in a dreary monotone, and all unconscious that she was giving voice to her thought. "I shall not see him any more. Oh! my darling! my darling! why were you so ready to doubt me?"

Then she began to wonder what folks would say when they heard her husband had left her—what cruel words her own people would say of him—and trembled at the idea of their merciless questionings.

The maid knocked at her door, and being told to enter came in with a cup of tea and some dry toast.

"Why, ma'am," she said, "you've never had your clothes off! Dear, dear! what will master say when he comes home!"

"When he comes home!" The simple words unlocked the floodgates of her grief; she burst into a storm of hysterical weeping. "He will say—he will say—you have not taken care of me," and laughing, crying, shrieking, she rolled and writhed upon her bed whilst Ann stood helplessly by.

As a last resource she called in the ever-ready Mrs. Merton, who was alarmed by the violence of the poor girl's attack; and when the hysteria was followed by a prolonged swoon she turned to Ann with the question,—

"When is your master coming home?"

"I can't say; he went off so sudden, whilst meals was out."

"Humph!" with quick suspicion that all was not as it should be between Mr. and Mrs. Cameron; "in that case you had better fetch Mrs. Cameron's mother, if she lives near here."

"They're not on friendly terms; I don't know how meals would take it."

"You must go; I won't take such responsibility upon my shoulders as this threatens to be."

It seemed to the good woman that Mrs. Moritz would never arrive; but at last she came, very much aggrieved at such a sudden summons, and prepared to restore her daughter to her senses by the quickest and most forcible means.

When she entered the pretty room, with its bright carpet and dainty furniture, Barbara was lying white and still amongst the pillows. Mrs. Moritz seized her by the shoulders, brought her head forward, and administering a hearty shake said, loudly,—

"Come, Barbara, rouse yourself! Oh, dear! oh, dear! who would choose to be a mother! Barbara! do you hear me!" and then she pounced upon a sponge, and made sundry vicious dabbs at the poor pale face, whilst Mrs. Merton looked on in shocked surprise.

"I think, Mrs. Moritz, you should have advice for her; it would be more satisfactory, especially as her husband is absent."

"Oh, nonsense!" retorted the mother. "I've often seen her like this before, and I never failed to bring her round again. The fact is, Barbara gives way; she should strive against weakness as I do."

Then, as her daughter's eyes opened wide and glistened upon her, she said,—

"If I had not been deceived regarding your indisposition I should not have entered Nugent Cameron's house. Ann really alarmed me; I thought you were seriously ill. What is this I hear about Cameron's absence! When did he leave you? When is he returning?"

"Oh don't! oh don't!" the girl entreated, putting out her hands as if to ward her mother off.

"Then you have quarrelled!" with a triumphant gleam in her eyes. "I knew how it would be. I knew you would not agree together twelve months; I told you so."

"Really," said Mrs. Merton, sharply, "you are adopting a peculiar tone, and one not calculated to soothe your daughter. Were I like some women, I might injure her peace irreparably by repeating your own ill-considered words."

"I am quite aware what I am saying. I do not speak without due thought or knowledge; and if my daughter and her husband have quarrelled she is only reaping the reward of her disobedience and folly. I was strongly opposed to the match."

"Well, for my part, I don't see the use of rehearsing old grievances, and certainly Mrs. Cameron is not in a fit state to listen to anything of an unpleasant nature. Come, my dear," turning to Barbara, "let me arrange your pillows more comfortably; there, that is a great deal better."

"Barbara, tell me why is not Nugent Cameron here?"

"He has gone away—on—on business," answered the piteous voice, faintly.

"That is a subterfuge," sharply. "Pray may I inquire at what place he is staying?"

The white face flushed, the entreating eyes

met her mother's, but found no sympathy there. With a great effort the girl sat up, and a slight tinge of haughtiness was in her manner as she answered,—

"Your interest in Nugent's goings and comings is very new, mother; and, forgive me, I cannot feel it my duty to gratify it."

"Very well," melodramatically. "I draw my own conclusions; they are not favourable to Mr. Cameron. Now, as you seem better, I will go, and I must say I consider it was quite unnecessary to summon me here at all."

"I am very, very sorry to have given you so much trouble, mother; thank you for coming. I shall soon be all right again now." But when the door closed behind Mrs. Moritz she hid her face in the pillows and cried so quietly, so helplessly and hopelessly, that Mrs. Merton's heart ached for her.

"My dear," she said, gently, "if, as Mrs. Moritz says, there is any difference between yourself and your husband, don't let pride come between you. Write him to return, or you will regret it to the last day of your life. Think of your marriage vows and act upon them! O child! child! don't make shipwreck of his life and yours."

Moved to confidence in her, Barbara held her hand fast.

"Don't misjudge me, don't misunderstand me. I want a friend so sorely, all my own people having turned from me. But if we are to be friends, you must believe Nugent the best and dearest of all husbands; you must fully acquit him of all blame. As for me, I am unfortunate, not guilty of wrong to him, only the victim of circumstances."

"Cannot you speak more plainly, my dear? I hate mysteries."

"I'm afraid I can't. I believe Nugent thinks he has cause to doubt me; but I am at a loss to know what roused his suspicions. It is true I have kept a secret from him, but I was bound by promise to keep it intact. It concerns another person, and so my lips are sealed."

"Promise or no promise, I would not let anything come between my husband's heart and mine. Of course, you will act as you think best, but I'm afraid you are adopting a foolish course."

"I should be tempted fiercely to follow your advice if I knew where my husband has gone," Barbara said, miserably; "but to no one else will I give any explanation."

"Very well; but you should remember this is a censorious world, and when it is rumoured that Mr. Cameron has left you, there will be not a few who will blame you bitterly, hint and say cruelly unjust things."

"Oh! but he will return!" she cried, desperately; "he surely cannot mean to make this parting final. He loved me so deeply, he had no such happy hours as those he spent with me. Oh! say you believe he will return!" and she grasped her friend's skirts with mad entreaty. "How can I live without him! You do not know how dear he is to me; but surely he who read my heart so well must guess, and when he dwells upon that thought he will relent. Tell me you believe that, if you would save me from madness; tell me he is coming back!"

Mrs. Merton was far from hoping or believing such a thing, but she could not add to the anguish of the piteous face lifted to hers; she could not crush out all hope from that bleeding heart. So she held the fragile figure close to her own bosom whilst she said,—

"My dear, men are strange, unreasonable creatures, and apt to be vexed by trifles; no doubt when Mr. Cameron has had time for reflection he will acknowledge his own folly, and hasten back to you. And when he comes, dear, you must not meet him with reproaches."

"As if I could, when all my heart is aching for him!" cried Barbara. "Oh! how good you are to me! I seem to have known you so long, and to have trusted you always so implicitly, that I cannot realise two days ago we were strangers. Must you go? Oh! but you will come again!"

"Yes, later in the day; and rest assured I

will stay by you until your trouble is over." Suddenly she knelt down by the bed and kissed the girl's face with tearful tenderness.

"Why are you so good to me!" Barbara asked, dreamily.

"Because you remind me of my own poor child."

"Is she dead?"

"Worse than dead," answered Mrs. Merton, brokenly. "It is a shame to burden you with my trials, but perhaps hearing them may teach you for awhile to forget your own. I never had but one child, and she was so bright and clever that Mr. Merton and I worshipped her, and perhaps educated her a little beyond her sphere. When she was eighteen she became acquainted with a gentleman named Disney, and the acquaintance soon ripened into love. He visited us, and we both liked and approved him. He told us his friends were perfectly willing to receive Daisy into the family, and at last brought us a letter (professedly from his mother), inviting her to spend a few weeks with them at their country home. Of course we were delighted, and spent far more than our means allowed in refurbishing her wardrobe. Ah! the poor child! At the last he must have made known his vile deceit to her; and she, because she loved him so well, was too weak to withstand his specious pleading. When she was leaving home she clung to us, weeping, and imploring us to love her always; but we only thought how well she cared for us, and, kissing her, blessing her, let her go from us to ruin. Oh! if we could only have known all!"

"Well, day followed day, and when no word reached us from our darling, we wrote to George Disney's parents, and they emphatically denied any knowledge of their son's engagement, and his mother declared the letter we had seen was nothing but a forgery. I think I was mad for a while, such terrible schemes of vengeance filled my heart and brain, and I was totally incapable of comforting Mr. Merton."

"Weeks slipped by, and I scarcely knew how to endure the cruel speeches I heard folks utter about Daisy; but being a proud woman I tried to appear hardened. Then there came a few lines to us from our darling, praying our forgiveness, and telling us that George would never bring her back to England until he brought her as his wife; but this could not be yet for many reasons. Her passionate pleadings for pardon and pity, her vain attempt to excuse his villainy, almost broke my heart."

"Then her father determined to go in search of her; and as I would not be left alone, we sold all our goods and started for Germany. But we never succeeded in following up the clue we had; so at last we were compelled to return to England, and as all old associations, all old acquaintances had grown hateful to us, we determined to settle here, where our child's shame and our sorrow were alike unknown."

"And have you never heard of her since?" asked Barbara, pitifully.

"No; whether she lives or no we cannot tell; but we have heard that Mr. Disney has returned to his home, and is soon to marry a wealthy cousin. Now let me go; recalling these things has made me unfit for any society but my own."

She rose, and without another word left the room, and Barbara lay alone with her misery until the sun went down. Then Ann told her Mr. Moritz was waiting below to see her.

She rose, and after adjusting her attire went down to meet her father; he was looking extremely worried, and after kissing her hastily, he said,—

"This is a very nasty affair, Barbara; it seems to me that all my children are destined to bring me trouble instead of comfort."

She was too miserable to respond bitterly—too miserable, indeed, to resent anything that might be said to her.

"I have brought a letter from that scamp," her father continued.

She suddenly woke to life and energy, and, stretching out her hand, demanded he should give it her. But he retained possession of it until he had concluded his remarks.

"It is addressed to me, and I have shown it to his late employers, feeling I owed that to them. Of course they will fill his place as quickly as possible. If at any future time he should return he will find it very difficult to procure employment."

"Give me the letter!" the unhappy girl said again, with barely suppressed fierceness, and her father placed it in her hands.

It was short and to the purpose.

"*En*—By this time you will have learned I have left my wife and home for ever. Let me say, before I go further, that I have destroyed all clue to my whereabouts, that even should you (by some improbable chance) discover me, I would not return to Northminster for all the wealth of C.æsus.

"I am now seeking a situation as far removed as possible from old scenes, old friends; and obtaining that I will forward you, from time to time, remittances to be used in behalf of your daughter—my wife.

"Understand that no blame attaches to her. Believe, if you choose, that I have wearied of her—believe anything but that she is guilty of any misdemeanour, any offence against me—she is all that is good and pure,

"NUGENT CAMERON."

Barbara reads the cruel words, and then, with a low moan of bitterest pain, let the paper fall from her nervous fingers, and turned her face to the wall as though she sought to hide her awful woes, even from her father.

He was touched by her silent anguish; he had expected loud cries and bitter tears.

"Barbara," he said, "of course we are all very grieved for you, but we always told you no good would come of your marriage."

"I am not likely to forget that," she answered, heavily, "but you must understand, father, I will hear no word spoken against him. In this unhappy matter I am alone to blame."

"We take that statement with a grain of salt. Oh! I wish to Heaven you had been less obstinate; you could have saved us so much anxiety had you chosen."

"My home was not a very happy one," wearily, "and come what may I have the memory of three months of perfect joy, upon which to dwell through all my life!"

"What are you going to do?" he demanded impatiently. "You can't stay here."

"But that is what I intend doing; if he returns he will be so disappointed to find me gone away. I am not afraid to be alone. I would rather be alone. And oh! if you can, prevent any of the others coming here. I cannot meet them. I wish neither for condolence nor assistance."

"You are as headstrong as ever. Will nothing ever break your pride?"

"Am I proud?" with a ghost of a smile.

"Heaven knows I have small reason to be. No, no, father, you misunderstand me. I am thinking only of the cruel things others will say of him, regardless of my presence; and just now, in my weakness, I feel I cannot listen to them and remain calm."

"I am afraid," Mr. Morris said, angrily; "that we must trouble you to receive us to-morrow; we want to talk matters over. Of course, if you would rather, the discussion can be held at home."

"Oh! no, no! I could not go out yet. I can't meet curious eyes, and I won't. If a meeting is really necessary you must come here, only remember that I have already decided what to do. Oh, father! father! for love's sake be kind!"

"You alienate my heart from you, Barbara, by your persistent obstinacy. I am truly grieved that this thing should have happened to you, both for your sake and my own. It will cause a great scandal."

After a little while he left her, and she crept upstairs again to her room.

Ann, with the curiosity of her class, suspecting something of importance had occurred, waylaid her on the stairs, and said softly,—

"How quiet the house is with the master

away. Do you know when he is coming back, ma'am?"

With her hand pressed hard upon her bosom she answered,—

"Mr. Cameron is away on important business, which will occupy him some considerable time," and, as she went on, she heard the girl cough significantly, and knew her tale was not believed.

The next morning, when Ann took up her coffee, she said,—

"It's funny master hasn't wrote yet, ma'am!"

"He is doubtless too busy;" and then she hid her face among her pillows and prayed to die.

Oh! the ceaseless agony of the long, slow hours—the torture of listening for a step that never came—a voice that never sounded in the familiar rooms.

He was gone from her; and at times she told herself he would never return—that she should never look upon his living face again. She had much to bear in those days, taunt and reproaches from her family, William not failing to add his mite—ill-disguised sneers and impertinent questionings from acquaintances and pupils; but she held on her way bravely.

"He will learn the truth at last," she said.

"If I had not such a hope I should break down utterly."

She refused most emphatically to leave her home as her relatives wished, and almost commanded.

"No," she said, steadily; "he must not return to find me gone." And, night after night she lit her lamp, and placed it so that its light fell broad and full upon the window. "If he comes he will understand that I am waiting and watching for him," she whispered to her weary heart; and then she would shiver and grow sick with dread, lest all her waiting and watching should be vain.

CHAPTER III.

It was at the close of a sultry July day that a man went wearily down a narrow, but respectable street in Liverpool towards the place he called home. He was a young man, although there were lines of terrible pain upon his face; his brow was furrowed, and in the dark eyes there was a look of irremediable woe. He walked listlessly along, his head a little bent; one or two women turned to look after him with a quick feeling of sympathy; he was so young to wear that hopeless, heart-broken expression, and they thought of their own sons growing up into manhood, and wondered if trouble would change them as it had evidently changed him. But he went on, careless and unconscious of all, until a voice behind him said,—

"Mr. Cameron!"

He turned and saw a slim, neatly-clad figure.

"Is it you, Daisy?"

"Yes; I am so glad I overtook you, as Mrs. Dexter is out, and I have the key of the house; we thought you would not come back so early."

"I was too tired to walk, and have come straight from the shop; let me carry your basket?"

"Oh no! thank you, it isn't heavy," and she glanced pitifully into his worn face. There was something very appealing, very mournful in the grey eyes that reminded him of Barbara's, and she had a suppressed manner, not usual in one so young, for she could not have been more than two-and-twenty; her voice was never lifted from that quiet, sad monotone in which she had addressed him, and the inexpressible mournfulness of her face accorded well with her tones.

Reaching a neat, prim house of two storeys, she proceeded to unlock the door, and then led the way to a coily-furnished sitting-room.

"You look so tired," she said, with the self-possession of a much older woman. "You must let me get your tea for you at once, and if you will take it here I will get my sewing."

He agreed to do so, and went away to "tidy up" himself, as his landlady would have termed it.

When he came down again Daisy was cutting bread-and-butter; she had brought out some

crisp lettuces and a few radishes to tempt his very poor appetite. He sat down and looked at the trifle curiously at her.

"I never can guess what relationship exists between you and Mrs. Dexter."

"As a matter-of-fact none. I met her quite accidentally, and was able to do her a small service, for which she was inordinately grateful. I was then seeking a situation, and she proposed I should come here and help her with the lodgers. I was only too glad to do so."

"You are an orphan?"

"No," she said, with a swift and painful blush, "I am not an orphan," and he felt instinctively the subject was a painful one.

"Forgive me," he said, gently, "forgive me if I have hurt you," and he laid a sympathetic hand upon hers. "I am afraid you, too, have suffered much."

"Yes," she said, with a quick-drawn breath, "but much of my sorrow was of my own working."

She was so agitated that she turned swiftly from him, and going towards the window leaned out, striving the while for calmness. Then she spoke, and her voice was so faint he could scarcely hear it.

"It isn't wise to dwell upon the past, it is over and done with, although, alas! the results of bygone sins, bygone follies, remain with us to the last."

A moment later she spoke again, in a more natural and capable tone.

"Do you know, Mr. Cameron, Mrs. Dexter is sorely exercised in her mind concerning you! You are so unlike all former lodgers, so different to Messrs. Todd and Hunter, that she imagines all sorts of things about you—weaves quite a halo of romance round you."

"There has been very little romance in my life. For a short time I foolishly hoped that I had found happiness; but just when my folly was at its height, I learned my bitter mistake."

"I am very sorry," she said, simply, her sad and tender face taking an added touch of tenderness; "what a cruel world it is at best!"

He sat toying with his tea awhile, then he asked, suddenly,—

"What does Mrs. Dexter say of me?"

"So many things, I can scarcely remember all. One idea is that you are the son of a gentleman, and have left your home on account of some family quarrel; another that you have had a disappointment in love."

"I was born in my present grade;" then, hesitatingly, "would you be surprised to hear me say I am married?"

"Married!" she ejaculated. "Mr. Cameron, where is your wife?"

"I have not seen her since April last," he said, heavily. "I shall never see her again; but I love her with all my life and soul!"

"And yet you left her?"

"There was no other course open to me," and in a few hurried words he told his story, for that night the craving for sympathy was too strong to be repressed.

Daisy listened pitifully, but when he had ended said,—

"I don't think you had sufficient evidence of her guilt! Oh! Mr. Cameron, go back to her!"

"No," he said, doggedly, "I have left her free. Don't think harshly of her, Daisy; she only did not know her own heart, and so she wrecked our two lives."

"You have not left her free. How can she be so while you live?"

She would have said more, but at that moment Mrs. Dexter entered, and the days following Nugent gave no opportunity for renewing the conversation.

But Daisy pondered over his story whilst she went about her work, and determined to plead the young wife's cause when chance allowed.

She had suffered herself so bitterly that her sympathies were enlarged, and even if Barbara had sinned who was she to cast a stone at her?

With Barbara the summer days seemed endless; each one found her more lonely, more hopeless. Her relatives had gradually with-

drawn themselves from her; and she knew folks eyed her askance.

But she held on her way steadily; day after day watching for the wanderer's return, and night after night the lamp that was to light him home burned brightly.

In all, and through all, Mrs. Merton clung to her, and defended her against the malicious gossip of neighbours, but much of it reached Barbara through Ann's kindly agency.

There was a cruel change in young Mrs. Cameron, and the likeness between her and Daisy grew more apparent; the fresh bloom had left her face, her figure had grown wofully thin, her step was slower, more uncertain, and all the gracious pride had gone from her demeanour.

She was, indeed, the very ghost of her old self, and but that they were wilfully blind, her relatives must have seen she was terribly ill.

One day she walked to the Botanic Gardens, and sitting down under a wide-spreading cedar reviewed all her past conduct, and tried to judge herself impartially. She knew herself so innocent of guile, and yet it was evident that Nugent thought otherwise, and she strove to guess the real reason for his abrupt and cruel departure.

As she sat brooding over her loss, longing in her despairing heart for death to come and end all, she heard a step, and glancing swiftly up saw Laurence Carden.

The sight of a friendly face was indeed welcome, and rising, she gave him her hand. The change in her was so marked, the fearful ravages grief had made in her so pronounced, that the man who loved her so ruthlessly was silent with emotion.

She smiled wistfully, pathetically.

"You think me changed, Mr. Carden?"

He muttered some inarticulate reply, and she hastened to add,—

"There is nothing really serious the matter with me, only I am always weary now, from morning to night, and my heart has such an uncomfortable way of throbbing madly, then seeming to cease beating."

"Barbara! Barbara!" he said, vainly trying to keep the love from his voice, "does no one care that you are dying inch by inch?"

"I think some would be glad to hear of my death. I have disgraced them all. Since he went," with a pitiful break in her voice, "I have been very lonely."

"Oh, my dear! oh! my poor dear!" he cried.

She shrank back dismayed and afraid, but he had lost all power of self-control, and went on, passionately,—

"Why were you so cold to me in the old days? Why were you so deaf to my entreaties? If you had but listened you would now have been my honoured and happy wife. Barbara, my darling, I have not changed. I love you still."

White as death she confronted him, a simple dignity in her mien that held him silent whilst she spoke.

"Mr. Carden, I was glad to see you, hoping you came as a friend; but the kindness I hoped for has been denied me. After such words as yours we must be strangers."

She turned as if to go, but he barred the way.

"You shall hear me," he said, fiercely; "I have waited too long for this hour. Barbara, in all the world you stand alone; your relatives hold aloof, your husband has wearied of and deserted you."

She tried to speak, but the poor pale lips could frame no articulate word. And he went on ruthlessly.

"Time was when you scorned my love, when, because you believed yourself so secure in Nugent Cameron's affection, you put me aside as a noisome creature. Perhaps the cruelty was unconscious, but it was none the less hard to bear. You laid my life waste for me, and gave yourself gladly to one whose shallow nature I knew all too well. I dreaded an hour of awakening for you; it has come. You are cast out of his heart and memory."

"Oh!" she moaned. "He loves me still, he loves me still! Have pity upon me."

"Pity!" he cried. "Does not all my heart

ache for you! Is not my life all yours! Oh, my darling, my darling! come away with me. In some place where we are unknown I will teach you forgetfulness of past pain. I will so encompass you with my love that it shall compel yours."

She looked at him a moment in a dazed way, but half-comprehending the gist of his proposal. Then the truth rushed upon her with overwhelming force, and a fierce light leapt into the great grey eyes.

"Let me pass," she said, swiftly; "this is too much! Surely my loneliness and sorrow should have protected me from such gross outrage as this. Stand aside, Mr. Carden, or I will call for assistance."

"You will do nothing of the kind," he said, with calm assurance, "for your own sake; you would only augment your trouble. Our names have been too long linked together."

"What do you mean?" she interrupted; and stayed her steps as he had intended she should.

He answered insolently,—

"Why, all Northminster knows that Nugent Cameron left his home because of your partiality to me."

She gazed at him with dilated eyes.

"I don't understand," she panted; and her hands met together in so tight a clasp that the dainty gloves she wore were split across the palms.

His voice struck on the balmy air with cruel incisiveness.

"He believed you were unfaithful to him, that you repented your marriage and longed for freedom, so that you might give yourself to me."

Still with that haggard look on her face, that wild light in her eyes, she asked,—

"What cause had I given him to think so ill of me? Oh! I will seek him out, kneel to him, and confess all. He will be sorry when he knows how he has misjudged me; he will love me the more for my suffering," all the while speaking as though to some third person.

"He has hidden himself so securely and perfectly from all you will never find him, or finding him, he would not listen to your word, because he believes he has proof of your infidelity."

"Oh, Heaven!" she wailed. "But this is worse than death."

"Listen to me again," said Laurence's persuasive voice. "I don't care now if you hear the truth of the matter; I would rather, indeed, you should learn it from my lips. When you married Nugent Cameron I swore to win you from him, or separate you for all time. I have done so."

He paused as if expecting some reply, but as none came he went on,—

"I thought when he failed you, your heart would turn to me. So I bided my time, and my chance came; your brother forged my name, but I would not expose him because I saw how he might be made my useful ally and tool. So I wrote requesting you to meet me here; but I also wrote to Cameron, telling him if he would know his wife as she was, he should be in the Gardens at half-past two the following day. From subsequent events I gather he was here, although unseen by us. On that occasion I made my manner impressive and solicitous; I placed the proofs of your brother's guilt in your hands with all ostentation."

"Hush!" said the white-faced woman; "you are maddening me. How could you weave so devilish a plot?" Her poor, trembling hands strayed to her throat and rested there as if to ease that dreadful sense of suffocation.

"I did it all for love of you," he pleaded, going nearer. "You are dearer to me than life or honour; I would sink to any depth of meanness or treachery if in the end I could win your love. Barbara, he is lost to you for ever; be reasonable, and listen to me."

She shrank back still further. "If for one moment I forget my duty to him, or fall in my devotion to him, may Heaven in its mercy take me in that moment to itself before I stain my

soul with worse crime. Now let me go. Oh, Heaven! I think you have killed me."

There was that in her face which held him silent—which made him obedient to her command.

He stood aside and let her pass.

She went slowly and unsteadily, as one smitten with sudden illness; and wondered if indeed he had been unwise in disclosing his diabolical plot to her, or if, finding Nugent wholly lost—completely imbued with belief in her guilt—she would turn to him (Laurence), and find consolation in his love.

How Barbara reached her home she could not tell; but at last she reached the shelter of her own room, and throwing herself on her bed, prayed she might never rise again. All hope of Nugent's return had left her. He held her guilty of a great wrong, and she knew how sternly he regarded anything approaching treachery and deceit.

"He will never forgive me—never wish to see me again," she muttered to her despairing heart. "Perhaps he has even learnt to hate me. And now there is nothing left me but to die!"

She strove to learn resignation; but her whole soul cried out against the harshness of her lot. She was innocent, why should she suffer? She was young, why should she be unhappy?

After that meeting with Laurence Carden there was a marked change in her that filled Mrs. Merton with apprehension. She was so languid, so careless of her own appearance, she who had been so trim and dainty in her attire. She grew inattentive to her pupils, regardless of their errors, unpunctual in her attendance upon them and presently their number began to decrease with great rapidity.

In vain her parents and Mrs. Merton reasoned with her; she listened apathetically to rebukes or entreaties; answered yea and nay mechanically, but made no change in her mode of life.

Each day found her paler, thinner, weaker, more hopeless (if that were possible), more eager to pass away from a world she had found so hard. She would see no doctor, would take no remedies—in this alone she was obstinate.

"He must wish me dead," she said, pathetically. "I am hastening to obey his wish!"

"But, my dear!" urged Mrs. Merton, "think of his remorse when he learns your innocence, and has no longer the power to repair the wrong he is doing!"

Barbara's answer was to unlock her desk and take from it a little packet of notes.

"These stand between me and want," she said. "I have not touched them, because he sent them, and I used to hope one day to place them all in his hands again. But he will not grudge them for my burial. I give them into your charge, because you will use them properly." Then she sank down in her chair and hid her face among the cushions, saying,—

"How long, oh, Heaven! how long, before I go!"

CHAPTER IV.

The next day she could not leave her bed.

"This is the beginning of the end," she said to Mrs. Merton, with a smile infinitely more sad than tears. "He will soon be free now."

Now thoroughly alarmed, her parents insisted upon calling in a doctor, who looked grave over his patient, and shook his head with all due solemnity.

"Your daughter's illness is more mental than physical, and unless the strain upon her is removed I can do nothing for her."

They cast about in their own minds how best to restore her to health; but no cunningly-devised scheme effected this purpose, and her one plea was, "Oh, let me see him before I die!" Then they inserted advertisements in all the most popular papers, entreating Nugent to return, but no answer ever came, and they were compelled to stand helplessly by, watching her drifting away from them.

One day she lay alone, with loosely-clasped hands, and closed lids, looking so like to death that Mrs. Merton stopped her own breath to listen for those faint respirations to tell her

Barbara still lived. Her face was very placid, and her bosom so quiet it did not seem to heave; the watcher bent over her.

"Barbara!"

The heavy white lids were uplifted, the great grey eyes opened with dim yearning in their depths.

"What is it?" she asked, feebly.

"There is one who has done you great wrong, and now waits to remedy that wrong. Will you see him?"

"You mean Laurence Carden. Why should I see him? How can he atone for his sin? Can he bring my husband back? Can he give me hope and life again?" she asked, with suppressed bitterness. "No, no; do not let him come to me!"

"But he is so urgent in his entreaty; he will not be denied access to you."

"Will you all conspire against my peace? Have I not suffered enough already that you would inflict fresh pain?"

"My dear, I pray you to see him, for your own sake; it may be that this very day may be made the beginning of good times for you."

"That is not likely," Barbara said, wearily. "But do as you please; I am too weak to struggle with your will."

Mrs. Merton went downstairs to Laurence. "You may come, but be very gentle with her; don't allow yourself to lose control over your feelings."

He followed her to the pretty, dainty room where Barbara lay. She turned upon her pillows as they entered, and, fixing her eyes upon Laurence said—

"Are you satisfied with your work? Surely your revenge is complete now?"

He knelt down by her bed, and hid his face upon the coverlet. The change in her was so great, almost to unman him. Was this pale, weak creature the Barbara he had known and loved? The hollow cheeks, the sunken eyes, the wasted hands that once had been so prettily dimpled and plump, were all so contrary to the picture he had cherished; the faint, low voice had no likeness to the clear decisive tones he remembered. Was it true his sin was slowly sapping away her life?

"Barbara," he said, brokenly, "forgive me!"

"It is such an easy thing to ask," she answered, with weary scorn of him, "but it is very hard to grant. You have spoiled my life, robbed me of Nugent's love, taken my health, my strength from me, made my name a reproach to my people, and yet you say 'Forgive me!' If you could bring my darling back, if you could give me again all I prized, and all that I have lost, I might pardon the load of sorrow you have made me bear."

He caught the thin hands in his, whilst his eyes dwelt remorsefully upon her changed face.

"Hear me, Barbara! 'Twas love that made me sin, and it is love that urges me to make what atonement I may. I have come to wish you good-bye, to tell you that I will never rest until I have found Nugent and told him all. Oh! if my search is successful, if I restore to you all that goes to make up your happiness and my misery, surely you will feel some pity for me, and will not withhold your pardon!"

"Go!" she suddenly said, lifting herself on her elbow. "Tell him that I wait for him, that I die hourly of my suspense and pain. Hasten! hasten! or he will come too late. If I live, but to hear him say he loves me I shall be content."

"And I may hope for pardon?"

"Yes, yes!" eagerly; "but I pray you go now; my time, I fear, is very short."

He raised her hand to his lips, and then went out, casting a lingering, backward look at that prostrate figure, that pure, pale face. Then he went hastily homewards, and, thrusting a few necessary articles into a portmanteau, started at once on his self-appointed task.

It was no easy thing, after so great a lapse of time, to find a clue to Nugent Cameron's hiding-place. True, he had in his possession an envelope with the postmark "Altisford," which he had obtained from Mr. Moritz.

He had ascertained that the place in question was a village about seven miles distant from

Liverpool, and he started at once for the place, wondering not a little what employment Cameron would find in such a locality.

Then he reflected that the postmark proved nothing; that probably in his desire to lose himself to all who knew or had an interest in him he would travel miles from his real dwelling-place to post those remittances he was always so careful to send.

As the close of an extremely hot day he reached Altisford, and, after leaving his portmanteau at the village inn, walked in the direction of the post-office.

It was not difficult to find, as the place consisted only of one long, straggling street, and the postmistress was also proprietress of the general shop, where one could purchase anything, from treacle to turpentine.

He entered, and was immediately pounced upon by a bright, bustling little woman, who declared she would be most happy to answer any inquiries he wished to make.

"Had she noticed a tall, dark young fellow among her customers?" he asked, breaking into his subject without any preface whatever. "He would, perhaps, only appear at stated intervals—say, once a month; but that the man he sought occasionally visited Altisford he felt quite assured."

The little woman was silent a moment, and her face took an expression of thoughtfulness. She passed her hand across her brow in a meditative fashion; then she said—

"I think I have seen the gentleman you want; but he did not strike me as being very young. He looked careworn and haggard. I hope he hasn't been guilty of any offence, sir, for I rather took a fancy to him."

"No, no! I have good news for him," Laurence answered, although a swift pang shot through his heart when he thought that perhaps Nugent would only learn his wife's innocence when she had passed away from him for ever. "Tell me what you can of him. I will make it worth your while."

"I don't know that I can tell you anything further. He does not live at or near Altisford—of that I'm sure. Neither do I know his name; and, after all, sir, the man I mean may not be the man you want. This stranger has a small scar on the right cheek bone, and the paler and more fagged he is the plainer the scar shows."

"You have proved his identity beyond a doubt. Now, have you no idea from whence he comes?"

"None at all, sir; but if you like to leave a message for him, in the event of his coming again, I shall be happy to deliver it."

"Thank you. There seems nothing else for me to do; and drawing out a card he scribbled, 'Return to Northminster at once. All can be explained. Make no delay, as B— is dangerously ill.—L. C.'"

The next day he went to Liverpool, from whence he wrote Mrs. Merton he believed he had found a clue to Nugent Cameron's hiding place.

But day followed day in fruitless searching, and each day found Barbara weaker, whiter, thinner, nearer the Valley of the Shadow.

Laurence Carden began to lose hope, and was fain to acknowledge himself defeated. He had employed the services of a detective, who had traced Nugent to Liverpool, and there lost him; and it seemed to both men that he must have succeeded in quitting the country under an assumed name, and so disguised as to be untraceable.

The messages Mrs. Merton sent Laurence daily were hardly calculated to reassure him. They urged upon him the necessity of sending some definite statement, "as Barbara is dying of hope deferred; for Heaven's sake and this awful suspense!"

Day after day the tired grey eyes looked the question she could not ask—

"Have you news of him? Is he coming?"

Day after day those who held her dear looked away from her as they answered "No," because the misery on her face was so cruel to see.

"He will not come in time," she said, and

turned to the wall with a pathetic gesture of utter weariness and woe.

But one evening when Laurence was walking to his hotel, he caught sight of a distant figure which, despite its stoop, seemed strangely familiar to him.

With fast beating heart he hastened after it, and the nearer he drew the more assured he was that he had found his man.

But he did not attempt to join him; he merely kept him well in view, and following down a side street, saw him pause outside a small, nest-looking house.

As he hesitated on the threshold his profile was well towards Laurence, and although the latter had been quite assured he was following Cameron, it was somewhat of a shock to have that assurance confirmed.

He saw Nugent enter the house, and stood still himself, pondering what to do, or how to approach him.

Now he had found him a wild temptation seized him to turn back and say no word that should restore him to Barbara. He was not a good or unselfish man and it seemed cruelly hard to him that he should be compelled to relinquish all he had so labouringly gained.

But then came the memory of a white face upon which Death seemed to have set his seal; of grey eyes dark with anguish, and he heard again that weak, entreating voice, saying—

"Tell him I wait for him; that I die hourly of my suspense and pain. Hasten! hasten! or he will come too late!"

He started, and walked quickly towards Mrs. Dexter's. The door was opened by Daisy, and even in the hurry and confusion of his mind he noticed the singular likeness she bore to Barbara.

"I want to see Mr. Cameron," he said, huskily. "Will you tell him my business is so important as to admit no delay?"

The girl bade him enter, and went away to deliver his message. In a few moments he heard steps outside, and then a voice, that said—

"I hope you will not detain me long. Great heavens! you!" as Laurence turned and revealed his face.

The hate and rage in Nugent's eyes were terrible to see. Involuntarily he clenched his hand and went a step nearer.

"Have you not done me wrong enough already but you must find me out and glory in my misery!"

"Be quiet; I have come from her!"

"Quiet!" all his long repressed fury breaking forth. "We are face to face now, and she is not here to stay my hand. If you have any manhood left reply to that!" and he struck him across the cheek.

Laurence Carden was no coward, but he stayed his hand then, remembering the great wrong he had done this prematurely aged man.

"I will not retort in like manner," he said, his voice strained and hoarse with his efforts at repression. "There will be time enough to settle our difference when she is dead! If you would see her alive start for Northminster at once!"

Nugent stepped back.

"Dying!" he said, wildly and half-doubtingly.

He had seen Barbara last in the flush of youth and health; how could he think of that fresh young life as being nearly ended! In that moment's anguish he recalled all her bygone tenderness—her pretty, dainty ways; and if he had cherished any anger against her he did so no longer.

He forgave her all her supposed offence, and remembered only he loved her. Like one in a dream he heard Laurence speak again—

"You can't leave here until half-past nine; let me beguile the time by giving you an account of my villainy (for so I suppose you will term it) and your credulity. First let me say that I loved and love your wife with all the strength of an undisciplined nature; and even now, could I be assured that in the end I should win her heart, I would go to greater lengths than I have already gone. But I cannot endure she should die before my eyes."

Then word by word he told his story, not omitting one revolting detail—not sparing himself, rather seeming to take a flippant pleasure in



"HUSH!" SAID THE WOMAN; "YOU ARE MADDENING ME. HOW COULD YOU WEAVE SO DEVILISH A PLOT!"

recording each phase of his strategy, and keeping his eyes bent the while upon his most unhappy companion, who sat as one dazed, not yet comprehending the extent of his woe, or able to understand fully how terribly he had wronged the woman he called wife.

Laurence looked at him with some contempt.

"Do you understand what I have said?"

"I am trying to," he answered, in a far-away manner; "and I am wondering if she will ever forgive me."

"Who can tell! You should have been more trustful. More than one innocent creature has been condemned to death by circumstantial evidence. Now, Cameron, you and I are enemies; when you are restored to common sense you will be the first to acknowledge it, and demand retribution. Very well, you know where to find me. The old house at Northminster will shelter me to-night, and until such time as you may seek to see me. I shall not run away, but whilst Barbara lives our hate shall be suppressed—for her sake."

"Yes," the other assented, drearily, "let it be so;" and he scarcely seemed to heed that Laurence Carden was taking his leave.

He sat silent and solitary until Daisy entered with a message to the effect that his tea was spoiling. In a lame and halting fashion he told her Laurence Carden's story, and ended by an appeal to her friendship and sympathy, praying her to go to Northminster with him.

"You nursed Mrs. Dexter through a long illness; why not Barbara?"

"Oh!" she cried, "you do not know who or what I am, Mr. Cameron. I am no fit companion for a true and honest woman. I am a castaway—a poor, sinful creature, whose whole life is blighted by one false step—by a mad and unreasoning love. I never thought to tell my story to any, but your request compels me to do so. Let me confess all, and then you shall decide whether or not I go with you."

In the same dazed way he listened to that low and broken voice telling its pitiful story—the

story of love defiled and trust betrayed: of a life all broken and marred to gratify a man's fleeting desire.

CHAPTER V.

DAISY leaned on the window-sill with her face turned from him, whilst her voice went on monotonously,—

"I left my home for the sake of one who never really loved me, but all my heart was his, and I was subservient to his every wish. He was a gentleman (by courtesy), and I the daughter of a tradesman; but from the first he seemed desirous of addressing me openly and honourably. He visited my parents, and succeeded in winning their favour. He assured them that his relatives were willing to receive me, and in my blind faith I believed him. So matters stood until one day he showed mother a letter, which he said his mother had written, the purport of which was to invite me to their home.

"How proud and glad we all were! Oh, Heavens! if you knew how I worshipped him, how I thanked him with all my grateful heart, for stooping to love so poor a creature as I!

"The night before my departure from home we walked together in the dear old ways along which I shall never walk again; and when he told me the letter he had shown me was a forgery—that his friends utterly refused to acknowledge me, and would repudiate him if he ventured to marry me. I was so young, and he was more than all the world to me, so when he pleaded I would go away with him I listened, and listening, I fell.

"But oh, when I bade the dear one goodbye that next morning I thought I should break down and confess all—oh, that I had! oh, that I had! But he was near me, whispering passionate words of devotion, comforting me in my shame and pain. So I turned my back upon my home, my innocence, and went with him.

"He had promised to marry me so soon as

circumstances permitted, and I believed he would keep his word. I need hardly say how he deceived me; it would be folly to give you all the details of my after life, or to trace out, step by step, the signs of his decreasing passion. I woke at last to the knowledge that he had wearied of me, and would fain be free of me; I saw, at last, my sin in all its hideousness, and was half mad with remorse.

"At last the moment which I had long anticipated came. He told me he was returning to England, and, of course, should go alone; that it was time to sever any imaginary tie between us, and that if I suffered the misery was of my own working. Of course I knew how such unions as ours always end. I listened dully; I seemed to have lost all power of speech, and I believe in that first hour of desertion I was not conscious of much pain. I heard him throughout, but uttered no reproach or lament. I had got beyond both. I even found myself wondering if, when he was gone, the dull ache in my heart would wake to keen, fierce life. I did not guess how it would be with me. How could I tell that day by day, hour by hour, my shame would eat deeper into my soul, to brand me, and set me apart from all good women—snatch from my outstretched hands any gift of love or kindness that might be offered them!"

Daisy paused then, and her breath came hard and fast from between her parted lips, but in a little time she was calm enough to resume.

"You have heard all. Judge me, and say if I am a fit creature to minister to a pure woman! Say if in Heaven or earth there is forgiveness for such as I!"

Nugent rose, every manly feeling stirred to passionate, tender pity for her. He gently possessed himself of her small, cold hands, and looking down upon the face which spoke rather of innocence than guilt, said,—

(Continued on page 424.)



JOCELYN DREW RICHARD DE BURGH BEHIND A GREAT STONE AND WAITED WITH BEATING HEART.

JOCELYN DE BURGH.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE STARSHINE WHITE OF A MOONLESS NIGHT.

NEVER till her dying day will Jocelyn de Burgh forget that walk. Up and up the steep hill path, dragging her father by the hand, scarcely daring to pause for breath for fear each rock, each tree, might conceal some belated watcher; wild with terror lest the dawn might come before Richard de Burgh was in safe hands, and she herself back unsuspected in Castle de Burgh.

The night was frosty and the stars shone clear though the moon had long since set. She shook with fear as they got out of the trees on to the bare mountain side where their moving figures must show black against the sky. But there was no sign of a living being, no sound but their own hard breathing as they breasted the hill.

Richard de Burgh's black fit was heavy on him; he never spoke all the long way; and Jocelyn had no breath for speaking, for he dragged on her hand like a tired child.

She stopped short as they came to the narrow open glen where the farmhouse lay. Here was the dangerous part. If Hugo had left any men they would be here.

She drew Richard de Burgh behind a great stone and waited, staring into the strange starlight that was so clear.

She had done well to fear. Between her and the house was a black figure, motionless; between it and her again, something that crouched low on the ground. The girl's heart leaped. It was Wolf, but who was with him?

She saw the dog lift his head and sniff the faint air that stirred; then, with long, terrible bounds he came to them. She saw his snarling mouth in the starlight. Would he know her? Like a flash she was in front of her father, but there was no need. The great beast was jumping at her, trying to lick her face, and the man who had stood behind him was running to her.

It was Moore.

"Mr. Richard!" he cried, softly, his face white in the strange light; "where have you been? Why did you leave the cave?"

"I've come home," Richard de Burgh said, blankly. And Jocelyn told Moore sharply all she knew.

The man nodded, drawing her father's arm through his.

"He didn't know you; he's worn out," he whispered. "He'll remember to-morrow, maybe. We've had a bad night's work up here; but 'twas but an accident. Not a soul out, glory be!"

Jocelyn drew back with a shudder from the grey dog at her feet. Did Moore know what her father knew?

"Is it true?" she asked. "Is Price dead?"

"Dead as a doornail! He fell from the top of that rise—you can't see; but it drops sheer to the glen, a hundred feet. There was no question of a raid after that. They had turned our cottage inside out before," bitterly, "Mr. Hugo de Burgh and Lord Huntley."

"Huntley!" the girl repeated, in surprise.

Moore nodded.

"It's his land. But you'd best get home. I'll see to him. No one knows you're out! For we are ruined if they do. You've saved him to-night, miss."

"No one knows," Jocelyn said, slowly. "Her heart was very heavy as she turned away. Things were going so badly, and she herself was so helpless."

"Oh! If I only had a little money, and could take him away and live quietly somewhere, I would never think of the De Burghs' again!" she thought.

She stumbled for very weariness as she went down the mountain-path. Somehow, ridiculous as it was, she had been sure her father would know her, and the disappointment made her faint-hearted.

"How long can it go on!" she wondered.

"Some day Hugo is sure to see me. I can't get

away without money, and so I must let my father live on the Moore's charity."

She had forgotten the need of caution in her sadness as she went through the park to Castle de Burgh; forgotten that the late dawn was rising, and that her slight black figure was showing clearly against the frosted grass in the greyness of early morning.

She saw no one as she gained the side door and went through the quiet house to her own rooms, nor did she dream that anyone had seen her.

Too tired even to think, she undressed and went to bed for the few hours that remained before Mrs. de Burgh should want her. Yet a thought stung her even while she dropped asleep. She wished that Lord Huntley, of Hollycross, had not been among her father's pursuers.

She was at her breakfast, pale and heavy-eyed, when Moyra burst in.

"Isn't it awful!" she cried. "There was a man killed on the mountain last night. He fell off a cliff. Father and Willie Huntley went out to see if they could catch those distillers poisoning the deer, and Price slipped; he was just ahead of them. And granny has an attack, and Gilbert is so worried. He says there will be an inquest, of course, and I haven't seen father or Willie Huntley."

"How could you see Lord Huntley?" Miss Brown's lips were parched.

"He's here, he came home with father last night."

"How did the man happen to fall?" Jocelyn faltered.

"Oh! he just slipped! He was a long way ahead of the others. They woke Gilbert last night—at least Willie did—and he is in an awful way. I don't know why. He says he would rather his name were Brown than De Burgh—oh! I beg your pardon!" with shame at her slip.

"You needn't, I don't mind," Jocelyn sat listless and weary. Of course Gilbert was an-

noyed, it would mean so much talk about the Moores.

"You look awfully tired," Moyra said with compassion. "Matthews said you were very late with Granny last night. Well, you needn't go near her to-day. She's ill, and I've sent for the doctor."

"Are they going to have an inquest to-day?" "I don't know. Perhaps they won't have one at all. Uncle Gilbert only thought they would. If they do, it would be a good chance for me—" she stopped and looked at Jocelyn.

"See here," she went on abruptly: "I suppose you know father wants me to marry Willie Huntley!"

"I guessed it. Why?" A sudden hot pang at her heart caught Jocelyn's breath. It was needless, for Lord Huntley of Holycross was nothing to her; yet it was there.

"Well, he doesn't want it, and neither do I!" pursued Moyra, forlornly; "but father keeps hoping for it all the same, and it makes him—hard on me."

Jocelyn stared at the tablecloth, for Miss de Burgh's eyes were full of trouble, her red lips set in a line of worry. She wondered if the speaker were really as sure of Lord Huntley's sentiments as she seemed.

"Father will be busy to-day, and granny won't want either of us, she's too ill. So, if you'll come, I will take you for a drive to see the country." She clatched her hands hard on her lap. "You will come, won't you? I can't go alone, and I must go."

"I'll come, if you're sure I can be spared." She wondered what her going out had to do with Lord Huntley; there did not seem to be any connection.

"We'll go before lunch," said Moyra, "and stop at a little inn I know. You rest now, you look done up. I must go to breakfast."

But Miss Brown could not rest. Instead she sat behind her window curtains gazing out into the paved courtyard of Castle de Burgh. There was a going to and fro of men, and presently a dogcart came to the door, a dogcart she knew. Had not she sat in it with Lord Huntley one evening, wrapped in his own fur-lined overcoat? She drew the curtain close round her, as Lord Huntley came out and got into it, tall and good to see in his long driving-coat. He looked stern and troubled, but—she sprang away from the window as if the heavy curtain could not hide her.

Hugo de Burgh himself was getting into the carriage beside Huntley, and as he did so he stared straight at her window.

Was it accident? Jocelyn dared not think. But before her eyes in the flesh was the man of whom Martha had bidden her beware; line for line as in her miniature, but older and liker by many degrees to Allica.

Miss Brown stood shivering in her warm room as Hugo de Burgh drove away.

"I believe I'm frightened," she whispered, even the sound of her own voice was better than silence, "deadly frightened! I'd like to run away now this moment up to Glen Farm and get my father and go out and beg in the streets; anything rather than go on living here. But I'd rule everything if I did, and play straight into Hugo's hands besides. Oh! what eyes he has in that calm sort of face! What should I do if I met him out with Miss de Burgh? I daren't go. She shuddered uncontrollably.

"Oh, I don't know what to do!" she broke out, desperately. "I know so little, I feel as though I were only one of the pieces on a chess-board, and someone else was playing the game. And I haven't a soul in all the world to turn to, not even my own father."

Miss de Burgh's knock at her door startled her.

"Aren't you ready?" she cried, standing fresh and fair in the doorway in a fur-trimmed driving-coat. "We ought to be off now."

"Are you sure I ought to go?" Jocelyn was pale and her lip trembled. "If we met your father, don't you think he might think I ought to be at home doing my work?"

"I'm certain you ought to go. You're getting nervous and low with all this staying in the

house. As for my father," drily, "I may as well tell you the precise reason of this drive is that we can't possibly meet him. He will be shut up at the Poles fuss all day. Otherwise, I couldn't go myself."

She hustled Jocelyn into her outdoor things, and fastened a chinchilla fur cape of her own over the thin jacket in spite of protest.

"I don't want to make an involuntary Arctic explorer out of you," she observed, "it's very cold this morning. Come on, Gilbert knows we're going, he'll smooth the grumpy down if she gets sufficiently better to remember us."

Instantly Jocelyn's spirits went up as they drove briskly over the country roads, in Moyra's little pony-cart. The sun shone, and to her great relief they took an opposite direction from Glen Farm.

"We'll lunch at 'Hag's Head,'" Miss de Burgh said, cheerfully, "and then we'll go for a walk. Are you good for seven miles?"

"I don't know," doubtfully, remembering the five accomplished already. "I'll try. What a name, 'Hag's Head'!"

"It's a hill. You get a good lunch at the inn. We are going to be in two places to-day," composedly, "and Hag's Head is going to be our *abode*."

"That means being in one place when you're supposed to be in another," Miss Brown returned, uncertainly. She was tired of mysteries, and here was another.

"Exactly," with a gay laugh. "That's Hag's Head there," pointing to a sharply cut hill quite near, "and that white stone house is the inn. It's called the 'Hag's Head,' too. They know me, and they'll give us more than we could eat in two days."

The troubled expression had left her face; instead, a look as of an adventurer who sees his goal near, was on it. Jocelyn gazed admiringly at her rosy fairness, even while she wondered just why they had come.

But Moyra de Burgh vouchsafed no information even after they had been welcomed effusively by the stout landlady, and treated to the best the house could afford. When even honey and cream had begun to pall on them, she rose briskly from the table.

"Can't eat another bit, Mrs. Jones," she cried to the landlady. "I'll just take a look at the pony, and then we'll go for a little stroll. This lady is a stranger."

"You'll be going to climb the hill, Miss Moyra, and see the country. There's a fine view. I'll have your tea for you by the time you come in. Ladies that drive always aren't like to walk far," the woman returned, affably.

"She thinks we got lazy, I suppose," Moyra remarked, as they went out. "Well, all the better, let her think! As soon as we get round that rise, and she can't see us, we're going to walk for all we're worth. And I only hope we shan't have to walk back again."

Jocelyn did not ask where they were going; after all it was no business of hers, and the good meal and fresh air had banished all her weariness.

She stepped out beside Moyra as if she were as fresh as she. But as they left the high road and took to the fields, her wonder grew on her. They were going somewhere, straight as the crow flies, but where?

Over stone walls and hedges, threading their way calmly through fields full of shaggy little cattle who stamped menacingly at them, and made Jocelyn keep very close to her guide. On the top of a high field they stopped to breathe, and Jocelyn started. Before them lay a great stone house; on one side of it were woods and mountains, between them and it more fields.

"Look!" she said, stupidly, "do I know that house? I seem to."

"You've been there," drily, "that's Holycross, and we're going there."

"Holycross! But Lord Huntley—you said—" Jocelyn stammered, and came to a full stop.

"I did; but Lord Huntley is with my father—and there are others," calmly. "Anyhow, that is where we're going. Mind you look quite every-dayish when we get there."

But she was not looking "every-dayish" herself, as they crossed the last field and struck into the avenue of Holycross.

"I pray we don't meet anyone," she said, nervously, as they neared the house, "and if we've come for nothing, I don't see how I shall ever walk all that way back again."

And Jocelyn saw, that in spite of this sharp walk, Moyra de Burgh's cheek was white.

"There's some one now," she said, slowly. "What shall we do?"

She nodded at the wide hall-door where a man stood wiping his heavy shooting-boots, with his back turned to them.

"It's all right." Sharp relief in her voice. Moyra de Burgh stopped short and gave a little low whistle.

The man at the door turned and came to them, his ugly face transfigured with joy and surprise. "Mr. Meredith—of course!" thought Jocelyn, "what a fool I am not to have known," for she had utterly forgotten Lord Huntley's guest.

Meredith had seized Moyra's hand, and stood as one who sees a hopeless dream realized. "Oh, Moyra!" he said, softly, "how did you ever get here, and just when I thought I should have to go without seeing you."

"So you know me as little as that!" The girl's eyes were full of tears, but the next instant she laughed.

"We walked all the way from Hag's Head, it's only four miles. We are spending the day there and seeing the country, Miss Brown and I."

Mr. Meredith had quite forgotten Miss Brown. He pulled himself together at the word.

"So you came here to me, how nice of you both," he said, sweetly.

But Moyra only smiled. "Miss Brown won't tell tales, Guy, and I have nearly killed her by dragging her here. I dared not come alone, they would have suspected me."

"I got your father's letter," Meredith said, slowly. "Did Billy tell you?"

"He told Gilbert," returned Moyra, "and—well! I couldn't bear it, so I came. Do you really go to-morrow?"

"I go to-morrow to work in a London office—sounds like me, doesn't it? Last night I nearly threw the thing over; but to-day—Moyra, what your father wrote wasn't true, was it? I'm not persecuting you to stick to a childish promise to a poor man."

"Was that what he said?" Meredith nodded.

"He forbade me the house, or to speak to you if I met you," he added, drily. "I don't know what you call this."

"I call it coming to see you," calmly, "anything but meeting you casually. Take us in, Guy, and let us rest, unless you think it would be persecution."

Meredith glanced at Jocelyn, who had discreetly lingered out of earshot.

"Moyra! Moyra!" he cried, softly, "was there ever a girl so brave as you?"

"You needn't think I'm disobeying him," she returned, virtuously; "I merely came here before he had a chance to forbid me," but her eyes told Guy Meredith that nothing in all the world would have kept her from seeing him.

CHAPTER XII.

A SPRING OF FADED HEATHER.

MISS BROWN, tired out with exercise, sat in a big chair by the library fire at Holycross, sat, to be exact, alone with her own thoughts, for Miss de Burgh and Mr. Meredith had swallowed their tea and promptly retreated to a distant window seat.

"You see, it's this," Moyra had said quickly, in a brief absence of their host, "Guy has no money, and father found it out while he was away and came home raging. He hasn't said anything to me, but he wrote to Mr. Meredith saying that I didn't want to marry him, and that he was subjecting me to unmanly persecution and stuff like that," with undutiful haste. "So Willie Huntley told Gilbert, and said that Guy

was going away to-morrow to his uncle's office in London, and that he was too miserable for anything. "Hush! here he is—but, you see, I just had to see him, don't you?"

Jocelyn nodded, but she wondered whether Lord Huntley was on Mr. Meredith's side or Hag's. He seemed fond of Moyra, and Castle de Burgh, added to Hollycross, would make a domain for a duke. Mr. Meredith unconsciously added to her wonder.

"Did Willie know about this?" he asked Moyra, as she poured out tea.

"No," with a hot blush, "and I don't want him to till I'm gone. He won't be back, will he?" apprehensively.

"Not he! Once your father gets hold of him I never expect him to be at home. I am going to drive you two as nearly back to Hag's Head as I dare, presently; and we shan't meet him that way."

But Moyra put down her cup often almost unattended. When should she and Guy Meredith be together again?

"We must start in half an hour," she said. "Oh, Guy!" and without a word to Jocelyn, the two somehow drifted over to the window-seat, where they talked so low that she almost forgot them.

She had undone the gray furs Moyra had put on her, but they hung on her shoulders, almost covering her shabby coat. The tea and the hot fire had given a soft rose to her cheeks, and her eyes were big and dark as she lay back in her chair. No one, seeing her in her sumptuous furs, with her quiet air of being quite at home in the splendid room, would have ever fancied her to be only old Mrs. de Burgh's companion.

A man standing silent and unseen in the doorway, marvelled at her beauty, as he saw her seated by his fire, her white hands idle in her lap.

"Miss Brown, here—at Hollycross!" had been his first wondering thought. "What brought her? Was anything the matter?" Yet he was glad—how glad he hardly knew—to see her. He walked up to her so quietly that neither she nor the pale hidden behind the window curtain ever saw him.

"How do you do?" he said, "did you want to see me?"

Jocelyn looked up with a frightened start.

"You!" she stammered. "No; why should I want to see you, Lord Huntley? I came, I came"—oh, how sweet his eyes were! And was Miss de Burgh going to stay hidden behind that curtain? Was she not coming to face him? "I had to come," she finished, lamely, without a word about Moyra, who surely could not be so foolish as to think she could remain unseen in the man's own house!

"Had to come," Huntley said, stupefied.

Jocelyn cut him short, with a dignity he had not thought possible to her.

"Don't imagine I wanted to come to your house," she said, quietly. "I will go now, if you like."

"My dear lady!" He was horrified at his own rudeness, "pray don't think I meant to be rude. I was astonished, I own, but I am also very glad."

"Don't be so fussy, Willie!" cried a mischievous voice; Moyra de Burgh's head popped out from the curtain. "I brought Miss Brown; she and Hag's Head are my allies."

"Oh!" said Huntley, blankly. But the head had vanished.

"How did you get here from Hag's Head?" he asked, smiling himself. "You didn't walk! It is one of Moyra's tricks."

"Yes," simply. "I didn't know we were coming here, or I don't think"—she stopped. After all, she was not going to put the blame on Moyra.

Huntley laughed, but his laugh was not mirthful.

"Good little Moyra!" he said, softly. "I wish there was someone in the world who cared like that for me."

So he was not—together—on Mr. Meredith's side, the girl thought shrewdly. She felt almost glad, for she was still smarting under his open astonishment at her presence.

"Pray don't disturb yourself, Moyra," Huntley called across the room. "Treat the house as your own, you know," and as he spoke, to Jocelyn's surprise a great softness was in his eyes. It was there still as he turned to her.

"If you can forgive my bearishness when I came in," he said, "will you give me some tea?"

Mrs. de Burgh's companion was forced to turn and busy herself with Lord Huntley's cups and saucers, and knew that as she did so, his eyes were bent on her face.

"I suppose you heard of that business last night?" he remarked, suddenly.

Jocelyn held herself hard; not a muscle gave as she handed his teacup.

"You mean about Price?" evenly. "Yes; I heard."

"I've been at the inquest; there was no need of one, really, but I thought it was better. They brought it in accidental death."

"Why was there no need?" she must find out how much he knew; her eyes met his without faltering.

"Because I saw the whole thing," deliberately. "Price was leading, I was next, though some way behind him. I saw him"—pausing—"fall. He was clear against the skyline, and it was not a slippery place especially."

Miss Brown's lovely colour had gone. Had this man's sharp eyes seen her father anywhere last night? Had he seen the dog?

"Yes?" she said, mechanically. For her life she could say no more.

"A man on all fours could easily have tripped him," Huntley continued very slowly, his voice too low to do more than reach her, "easily, and been too low on the ground to be seen above the heather."

"Did you see—any man?" she forced the words out.

"I saw one, afterwards," deliberately. "But he was too quickly past me to be sure of him, except that he was not Moore, nor was he a distiller."

An awful fear was at her heart. Could her father have pushed Price and said it was Wolf? And did this man know it?

"I suppose," she was not looking at him, "you said so at the inquest?" But she went on, before he had time to answer, "How do you know it was a man? What man could crouch like an animal and get away without your all seeing him? Don't you think it might have been a dog?"

Her eyes flashed as she looked at him, the blood was in her cheeks and lips.

"Oh, you rich people!" she cried, bitterly, "how you hound the poor and unhappy."

"Do we?" his brown cheek reddened. "If so, why did I hold my tongue at the inquest?"

So he had not spoken! But her answer was ungracious enough.

"To have a freer hand, I suppose, Lord Huntley, I feel sure you are wrong when you think a man pushed Price down the cliff. There was no one out, Mr. de Burgh said."

She was so fearless, so lovely, with her flushed cheeks and blue eyes, that Huntley smiled in her face.

"You are on the side of those people, aren't you?" he said. "Why?"

"Because I think the struggle is so unequal. I told you so long ago. Oh! Lord Huntley, why won't you let them be?"

She spoke with such imploring earnestness that he stared at her.

"I can't, now," he rejoined, gravely. "Price was not exactly in my good books, but he died through those people in the mountains, and they will have to go."

A lump was in Jocelyn's throat, but she spoke bravely.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," she said, gravely, and the ring of her voice touched him to the quick, yet he answered, sharply: "And a life for a life. You forget that. But it has nothing to do with you. Why should I give you the horrors! Only, if you take an interest in that Moore girl, if I were you I should tell her to go. Are you worried about her?"

Jocelyn nodded.

"She was kind to me," she faltered, and Huntley knew that kindness was a rare thing to Mrs. de Burgh's companion.

"Moyra is kind, isn't she?" he asked, certain of his answer.

"I would do anything for her. That is why I am here to-day."

"I suppose you know Mr. de Burgh would be furious. Well, I can't help it, nor can you! It seems to me that women will dare anything if they care for a man."

"Anything," she assented, and she thought of last night and the night before. "Anything."

"By-the-way," Huntley said, suddenly, "do you often stroll in the garden at dawn?"

If he had boxed her ears she could not have been more astonished; for a moment she looked at him, then she answered, without a quiver,—"I did this morning. I never did it in my life before. Why? Did you see me?"

"I slept at Castle de Burgh, or, rather, I tried to, and I got up at daybreak and looked out the window. You looked so tired and worn out, walking over the frozen grass in the gray light."

"I was. I had a bad night; but I slept after I came in."

"Oh! if he would only not be so kind, if he would only distrust her. She longed to say outright that she was only a spy in the house of the de Burghs, that she had not even got there honestly."

"You must be half dead with walking all the way here from Hag's Head. His gray eyes were on her face, on the fatigue of her attitude, for truly she had borne much that afternoon."

"No; but I think we ought to get back!" She was alarmed at the hour as she glanced at the clock. "Oh, Lord Huntley! we shall be too late!"

"I'll drive you," he said, shortly. "Moyra, I think you ought to be off; do you know that?"

He had showed no surprise at Moyra's presence; perhaps he had known she would come; but he was uneasy as he saw the time.

"Come, Moyra!" he said again, "your madcap trick may get you into trouble if you are not back before dark."

Moyra, with a thick veil pulled down over her face (she had worn no veil when she came, and Jocelyn knew she had been crying), emerged from the window seat.

"All right," she answered, shortly, "you drive us; I don't want Guy to come."

"Better not," Huntley agreed.

He put both girls into the dog-cart that stood ready at the door. Moyra de Burgh chose the back seat, and Jocelyn made no fuss, for she knew the other girl was past talking.

As she sprang into the high cart her dress brushed Lord Huntley's hand, and he looked quickly at it. Something had pricked him, and he saw it was a sprig of dead heather.

"A remembrance of your walk from Hag's Head!" He pulled the twig off and stuck it in his buttonhole. An hour later he would have given worlds not to have seen that dead sprig.

Miss Brown flushed unmercifully. There was no heather growing between Hag's Head and Hollycross, that twig had stuck to her skirt in the mountains.

"Heather is plentiful to-day," he continued, idly. "Hugo picked up another piece on the stairs at the Castle this morning."

Miss Brown was certain that he must hear the beating of her heart. Oh, why had she not brushed her serge skirt as she always did before putting it on!

"Please drive fast, Lord Huntley," she said, for she could bear no more, "and throw away that shrivelled thing."

Huntley looked at her with sweet mischief through his thick lashes.

"Not I! I will wear it till you give me a better flower." He laughed, but his hearer did not. Something told her that dry sprig would bring ill-luck on her, but she was too proud to beg for it. She sat almost as silent as Moyra, till they stopped at the last turn in the road before the "Hag's Head" Inn. She sprang down thankfully, heedless of Lord Huntley's helping hand. Moyra seized her arm, and the two ran like hares along the quiet country road.

Huntley sat quite still, looking after them before he turned his horse.

"Well! I suppose I've thrown away Hollycross for Meredith," he reflected. "But Myra and I—the thing was impossible!"

He drove smartly back to his own gate, and then pulled up, utterly taken aback.

Hugo de Burgh, riding a big roan horse, was waiting for him. Was Myra found out? Lord Huntley was not quite comfortable.

"They told me you were out, at the house, so I wouldn't go in," Hugo said, languidly. "I wanted a little exercise, and something occurred to me. The more I think of it the more certain I am that someone in Castle de Burgh warned those Moore's last night."

"Don't you think you're rather mad on the subject?" Huntley said, shortly. "Who could—except Gilbert? and he would not."

"It was not Gilbert," succinctly. "Do you remember that heather I found? Well! you didn't bring it home, nor did I, we were on a path never in the heather. Whoever brought that to Castle de Burgh had been up the mountain by the short cut."

Lord Huntley's hand was on the lapel of his coat, turning it quickly over.

A hundred things unthought of before rushed over him, Miss Brown's early stroll in the garden for the chief; and to his wild surprise, distrust of her meant a dull pang at his heart.

"I don't agree with you," he remarked, sharply. But he did.

He was very silent all that evening. Those honest blue eyes, that quivering, earnest lip, were they untrue and their owner a liar? He never said a word to anyone of the heather hidden by his hand while he talked with Hugo at the gate.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1836. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

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(Continued from page 420.)

"You poor child, what shall I say to you! What comfort can I give you! Do you not know the tempter is worse than the tempted! that your offence is infinitesimal compared with his! Poor girl, I still say to you come home with me! Barbara is not like other women, but full of sweet graciousness and tender pity, and because you are in sorrow (and not the less because you have shown me many kindnesses) she will begood to you."

"I will come," Daisy answered, swiftly, "because you have spoken comfortingly to me, but when you have no further need of me I shall return to Liverpool."

"Do you never think of returning to your friends, Daisy?"

"Oh, no, no! How dare I face my mother! She was so good to me always, but she is a proud woman; do you think she could forgive me! And my father too! Oh!" flinging her hands together in an abandonment of woe, "I shall never see them any more! I dare not go to them burdened with shame! Let them believe me dead or wholly forgetful; it is better so. Say no more now of my trouble. Let me think how best to help you; there is much to do before we start."

She went out and up to his room, and began to pick a few things in his portmanteau, her tears falling fast the while.

"In all the world," she said, "there is no one to love me: no tin but mine that may not win pardon and pity."

Later on they walked together to an adjoining station, and saw Laurence Carden on the platform.

Nugent assisted his companion into a third-class carriage, and, turning, caught a glimpse of Carden as he entered a first-class.

"He, too, is going back!" he thought, as he

settled himself beside Daisy, but he said nothing to her.

It was a very quiet journey; the young man's mind was so racked with the thought of Barbara's sufferings, his heart so full of fears for her, that he found speech impossible. If he had never prayed before he prayed then with all the passionate force of a half-despairing soul. Surely Heaven in its mercy would not take that precious life, would not wrest his darling from his arms!

What she would say, how she would look, were questions which occupied him through the long and weary miles he was travelling.

Could she forgive him, his flight, his harsh judgment—she who had been so true and tender! He groaned as he bowed his face in his hands, and said to himself,—

"If she will not forgive I am a lost man." Then Daisy spoke (how glad she was that there was none but herself to witness his grief),—

"You must hope for the best," she murmured, "and because she loved you much she will forgive much."

He looked at her with heavy eyes. The nearer he drew to Northminster the fainter his hopes of Barbara's recovery or their ultimate reconciliation grew, and perhaps, guessing this, Daisy thought it best to leave him to himself, afraid lest her words should aggravate his fears.

It was past midnight when they reached the little town, and no conveyance was obtainable, so they started at a brisk pace for Barbara's home, all unconscious of the dark figure that followed them, unheeding of the hoarse voice which again and again muttered,—

"He, who doubted her, may go to her; I, who love her, remain outside. Heaven! it is not just."

And when they reached the quiet street they paused, for the road was thickly strewn with straw, that deadened all sounds of passing wheels or hurrying feet.

Nugent caught his companion's arm, and even in that dim light she saw his face so changed, so distorted by agonising dread, as to be like nothing else human.

"She is dead!" he gasped, in a strange half-whisper. "She is dead, and I have killed her!" The dark figure drew nearer.

"Too late!" he said—"you have come too late!" and there was fiendish exultation in the tone.

But neither Nugent nor Daisy heeded him. The girl was speaking softly but rapidly,—

"Why does your heart fail you when you are so near! Did not Mr. Carden say she was ill—very ill? If she were dead there would be no need to muffle sounds. Come; but one glance at the windows of your home will tell you all you need to know."

He suffered himself to be led onwards until he was opposite Barbara's window. There a faint light was burning, and a woman's shadow flitted across the blind.

"Go!" he said, in that same awed voice; "ask for her. I am weak as a child, and afraid lest I should learn the worst."

But Daisy would not venture alone, so together they entered the little garden, whilst Laurence Carden stood outside the gate, with moody, yearning eyes, longing, but not daring to follow. The door was opened by Mrs. Moritz.

"So you have come!" she said, sharply, whilst her eyes rested suspiciously on Daisy's shrinking figure; "but she will not know you," and she opened the door for them to pass in.

"This is the new nurse," Nugent informed her, by a gesture indicating Daisy.

"Ah! she won't require a nurse much longer," with cold brutality, and watchful the whole while of his misery.

"How is she?" he asked, brokenly. "For Heaven's sake, let me see her!"

"She is dying, and as she is unconscious your presence won't hurt her. Come."

Like one made drunk with wine he followed her up the narrow stairs, whilst Daisy stayed below. He was conscious that some one came out upon the landing, and held a light to guide his steps, conscious, too, that a voice said,—

"Thank Heaven, you are here at last!"

And then he stood in Barbara's room, and saw a wasted figure on a bed, a wan, small face, whose pallor seemed that of death. In the same vague way he knew it was Barbara he looked upon, but he tried to speak, to move, to touch her, but could not.

It was curious that in such a moment words from that saddest of love-stories should recur to him; but so it was, and he found himself whispering to his heart,—

"Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! and lips, O you,
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!"

Mrs. Merton touched his arm.

"You would wish to be alone? Poor fellow—poor fellow! it is easy to see you, too, have suffered," and then she stole away, taking Mrs. Moritz's with her; and suddenly the floodgates of Nugent's grief were opened, and casting himself down beside his wife, he broke into the hoarse and terrible sobs of a strong man.

"Oh, wife! Oh, love—my love, speak to me! Live, if but to see my atonement! Sweet, was your grief hard to bear! Alas! mine is crueler still, for I have condemned you, who were innocent, have had hard and bitter thoughts of you; have cursed the day we met, have regretted that I could not take back the love I had given you! Oh! for Heaven's sake, break your terrible silence—give me back word for word, and kiss for kiss!"

He seized her hands, those cold, alim hands that lay inert in his clasp, that had been so wont to fondle his, to gladly and proudly minister to his wants. He kissed the fragile fingers with mad passion and hopeless yearning, but to his pleading there came no reply; the heavy lids were fast closed, the dear grey eyes hidden from sight.

She lay so pathetically unconscious of his presence—the whose one desire had been to see him again before death claimed her—that an awful dread filled Nugent's soul, that she had really gone from him. He laid his ear to her heart. Ah! thank Heaven, it still beat, but so feebly and faintly as to be scarcely audible.

He fell on his knees, uttering hearty thanksgivings that she was yet spared, remembering gratefully, that "while there is life there is hope."

Then Mrs. Moritz returned.

"You must leave Barbara now," she said, in her hardest tones; "you are allowing your emotion full scope, and who can tell but she may be conscious of it, and injured by it? I have had the little backroom prepared for you."

He rose, feeling it wisest to follow her injunction, but at the door he paused.

"I shall not lie down, so if you should want me—"

"I shall not want you," she interrupted, coldly. "You had better get a little rest; that is if your conscience will allow you to sleep."

He went heavily away, and sat down as a stranger in his own home; and he remained undisturbed for very long, and he began idly to wonder what had brought Mrs. Merton into close contact with Barbara.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Mrs. Merton left Barbara's chamber she went slowly downstairs, and towards the pretty parlour where she had been told the nurse was resting. In the dim light she saw a small, neat figure, a head crowned with heavy brown braids (for Daisy had laid aside her bonnet), and there was something in the girl's attitude which touched her motherly heart; something so suggestive of sorrow that her voice took a gentle tone, as she said,—

"I am afraid you have felt yourself neglected!"

Daisy turned with a wild shriek, and casting herself on her knees hid her face in her hands.

"Mother! mother! I am your unworthy daughter!" and held her peace, afraid to say more—afraid to look into those eyes, so glorified by sudden joy and deep love for her.

She felt the close clasp of warm, soft arms about her, and then her hands were gently drawn from before her face, and her mother's lips rained kisses upon her mouth; her mother's thankful tears fell upon her brow, her cheeks; and clinging close she prayed,—

"Forgive me, if you can, forgive me; say that you do not quite forget the days when I was your innocent and happy child; then I will go away, and not shame you any more by my presence. Had I known—had I dreamt that any chance would bring us face to face—I would have prayed Heaven incessantly to let me die before that time came. Oh! my dear, my dear! I never so dear as now when I feel how I have lost you, do not look at me in my degradation; let your eyes shame me," and she struggled to free herself from her mother's clasp, but Mrs. Merton held her firmly.

"Daisy, my darling child, you don't know what you are saying! You don't guess how long and earnestly your father and I sought for you, with never a shade of anger in our thoughts of you, never a bitter feeling in our hearts. You don't know how we have longed and prayed for this hour, how through all we have pined, but never blamed you; and now that you are found, please Heaven, we will never let you go."

It seemed to the kneeling girl that those words of love and compassion could not be for her. In her wildest dreams she had never pictured such a scene as this, never dared to believe her head would be pillowed upon her mother's breast, or that any welcoming kiss would be accorded her.

She had dreamed sometimes that she might journey back to the old home, and from some safe nook see her parents once again. Sometimes, too, she had imagined herself on her deathbed, and then she had thought, "When I am assured that my life is nearly gone I will send, entreating them to come to me; and then, perhaps, because I am dying, they will forgive me;" but to be received with joy—oh! she had not dared to hope so much.

Gently Mrs. Merton lifted Daisy from her knees, and drew her down on the couch beside her.

"My girl!" she said, "my own girl! how could you doubt your mother's heart? Lift up your face. Poor lass! it is paler and thinner than it should be; and the light has gone from your eyes, but, please Heaven, not for ever." Then after a pause, "How selfish I am in keeping my happiness all to myself! How could I leave your father in ignorance so long! Put on your hat, and come with me. Oh! how much we have to say to each other!"

She went into the hall, and called Mrs. Moritz. "I am going home for a little while. I have found my daughter." And in answer to the other's questioning look, "We quarrelled long ago, but the fault was mine; and she, poor girl! could not endure harshness, and so ran away from us. But I am wiser now," her voice broken with joyful tears.

"Oh, mother! mother!" Daisy murmured, under her breath, "how can you be so hard to yourself!"

But the happy woman would not heed her remonstrance. Clapping her hand close and fast, as if she feared once more to lose her, she led Daisy out into the starlit night.

At the threshold of her parents' house she paused, and shrank back; but Mrs. Merton threw open the door, and cried, "James! James!" and something in her tone told the honest waiting heart that the weary waiting was over now, that his own lamb had come back to the fold.

He ran out, and in utter silence caught her to his breast, and drew her into the room.

Oh! how much they had to tell! Daisy, with her face hidden on her father's broad shoulder, recounted all that had happened to her since she left the safe shelter of her home.

Such a poor, coiled little Daisy she was now, with no likeness in heart or mind to the Daisy of bygone days! But it comforted her, in the depths of her degradation (although it hurt her too) to feel that they held her so dear—she, who had so sorely sinned against them and against herself.

When they had grown calm again Mrs. Merton rose.

"I must look in again at the Camerons' before I go to bed. Daisy, you stay with father."

And, kissing her, she hurried away. Mrs. Moritz met her on the stairs.

"There is a change in Barbara; she seems weaker, if possible, than before; but she is conscious. Will you see her?"

"No, no, not now. I should perhaps disturb her. But I should like to speak with Mr. Cameron."

"He is in his room. You can go up."

In answer to her light tap Nugent opened the door; and now that the first excitement caused by his arrival had passed away she could see how changed he was, how little resemblance he bore to the happy young bridegroom of a few months since. There were furrows on his brow and silver streaks in the dark hair. His haggard eyes and sunken cheeks bore full and perfect testimony to his cruel sufferings.

Her own happiness made her very, very tender. She leaned forward and kissed his brow.

"I am old enough to be your mother," she said, with a tearful smile, "and I owe you so much."

He looked surprisedly at her, and she hastened to add,—

"You have made me the most joyful woman in all England! All unconsciously you have restored my daughter to me, and I thank you—I bless you with all my full heart!"

He was not in a state to evince surprise at anything that might occur, and seeing this Mrs. Merton went on,—

"Now I have good news for you—Barbara is conscious. Will you see her?"

He trembled like a weak woman, and a moment shaded his eyes from her.

"Is she prepared to meet me?" he asked.

"No, but I will go to her now; stay here a short while," and, without further parley, she left him, and went to the sick room.

Barbara turned her head at her entrance, and signed to her to go nearer; then she spoke in a faint voice, hardly above a whisper,—

"Whilst I lay here unconscious, I yet seemed to feel another presence in the room, a presence that has long existed only in my fancy; tell me has it been fancy to-night?"

"My dear," evasively, "what shall you say if I tell you that Nugent is found, that he knows all, and will be with you to-morrow?"

"Oh! do not jest with me! It is unseemly to trifle with a dying woman!" Barbara answered, a faint flush of colour stealing into her wasted cheeks.

"I am not jesting, my dear; before to-morrow night you will be clasped in your husband's arms, all your pain and waiting ended. You poor child! how cruelly you have suffered!"

"I would he were here now!" wistfully; "perhaps to-morrow will be too late. Are you quite, quite sure he will be with me soon! I am so weak I think I could not bear disappointment!" and the great grey eyes sought Mrs. Merton's with painful anxiety in their dark depths.

Mrs. Merton smiled reassuringly.

"He is on his way to you now. What, Barbara! can't you bear good news?" as the poor girl sank back, deathly white and gasping, among her pillows. "Fie! is this the way you show your joy! Why, Barbara, what will he say to you when he comes! He will fancy you are angry with him, that you will not forgive his silly blunder, that you love him no longer."

"Do I not love him? Oh, Heaven! has not my passion for him brought me to this! Say when he will be here! Must I wait long before I see his dear face and hear his voice! Every minute seems an hour until he comes."

"My dear child, he is here, in this very house, waiting to be called to you."

"Bring him to me now—now! Oh, Heaven be thanked, he has come in time."

Mrs. Merton walked to the door and called Nugent.

He came with swift light steps, and, as he entered, the good woman went out, leaving husband and wife alone together.

"Nugent!" cried the faint, but passionate voice, "Nugent, my husband!" and she was taken to the true heart that had sorrowed so long for her sake, that had been so tortured by the thought of her infidelity. Surely that moment's bliss atoned for all the long weeks of misery they had endured! Presently she lifted her face, all blotched and blurred with his tears, that had fallen so fast. "Oh, Nugent!" she whispered, "if only I could live! Oh, my darling heart! in a little while we say good-bye for ever! I had hoped to make all your life happy, to spend such long golden years with you!—but now, in a little while, I shall say my last word to you, and close my eyes upon all I have held so dear! Then they will take me from you. Oh! my dear! my dear! hold me close! I am slipping away from you now!" and then she lay back in his arms so supine, so helpless, he believed her dead.

But Barbara did not die; slowly, step by step, day by day, she came back to life and health. There were still times when they feared that she would go, when they watched by her with heavy hearts and bated breath. But Heaven was very merciful to Nugent, and granted him the prayer with which he importuned its gates.

With the first breath of September the faded cheeks took a faint tinge of health, the grey eyes grew more hopeful, the sweet voice clearer and firmer; and then the doctor, smiling and openly exulting in the fact that he alone "had pulled her through her illness," declared Barbara out of danger.

After that she mended rapidly, until at last she was able to be carried downstairs; a week later and Nugent led her into the garden, beautiful now with dahlias, asters, and flaming African marigolds.

From the time of her arrival Daisy had been her constant nurse and attendant; so devoted, so humble, so conscious of her own shortcomings, yet so cheerful and helpful to all around, that Barbara found herself often wondering over her patience.

One day she essayed to tell her story, feeling, she said, that in common justice Barbara should be acquainted with it.

But the latter stopped her with a quick, imperative gesture,—

"My dear, I know all. I knew before ever we met, and with all my heart I grieve for you. Daisy, this must make no difference to our friendship," and she stooped and kissed the tender, sorrowful face.

Nugent saw with anxiety, that with returning health Barbara shrank more and more from meeting old friends and acquaintances; she had been so hardly treated by one and all in her adversity, had suffered such cruel judgment, that perhaps it was natural she should loathe Northminster, with its familiar streets and ways, and all the old familiar folk; certain it is that not all his utmost persuasions could induce her to go out.

He cast about in his own mind what to do, and often talked the subject over with Mr. Merton, who one day startled him by proposing emigration.

"The wife and I would be glad to go out with you, for our poor lass will never be happy in England; she is so afraid of meeting the villain who betrayed her. Now, Cameron, I like you, and am anxious to help you. I've a tidy sum of money laid by, and half of it is at your service, if you'll join lots with us."

"Your proposal is so sudden, it takes away all power of thanks or thought. Give me a week to consider it."

"Take longer if you choose, so that your answer is yes."

Barbara eagerly embraced the proposal. "Oh," she said, "let us go among strange scenes, we shall be able to forget all that has hurt us. I have grown to hate Northminster, and should not grieve if we left it to-morrow, never to return. Think too, dear, what a fine country Australia is, what an opening it will be for you!" and she wound her coaxing arms about him.

Of course she prevailed; and a month later the Camerons stood on board the *Luciana* taking their farewell view of England's white cliffs and green shores.

That night, as husband and wife paced the deck she looked into his dear face with anxious, loving eyes.

"Are you quite sure, dear, you don't regret this day's work?" she asked.

"Regret!" he answered, passionately, "when I have you! No, no! my darling wife; for your sake I am glad to be well away from all old associations."

"Poor boy!" she whispered, standing on tiptoe to touch the prematurely silvered hair with loving hands, "poor boy! How my secrecy and your silence, made you suffer. But, please Heaven, no cloud shall ever rise between us in the future."

He pressed her closer.

"Barbara, did you see Carden watching us off this morning?"

"No; was he really there?"

"Yes, and I found it in my heart to pity him. He looked so forlorn and wretched."

Three years have passed since the *Luciana* sailed from England, and now there is no man more respected, more prosperous, than Nugent Cameron, in all Melbourne; no man more blest in his wife than he in Barbara.

And Daisy is still Daisy Merton, and will be so to the end, for her "whole life's love went down in a day;" but surrounded as she is by loving, loyal hearts, she cannot be altogether unhappy.

[THE END.]

THE RIVAL SISTERS.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LOIS stood still. She could not have moved one step forward if her life depended on it; and thinking she had not heard, the old lady turned to her and repeated:

"I want my son and his wife to know you, my dear. You have been but a short time beneath this roof, but in that time you have made yourself so indispensable to me that I could not do without you."

Both Philip Desmond and his wife glanced carefully in the direction indicated by his mother. The room was in such dense shadow that they only saw a tall, slim form in a dark dress that seemed to melt into and become part of the darkness beyond.

They bowed slightly in the most thoughtless manner; then turned their attention to Mrs. Desmond, who had commenced telling them how eagerly she had watched for their coming, and of the strange presentiment that something was going to happen.

That moment stood out for ever afterwards in the life of hapless Lois.

She thought that when her eyes rested on the face that had been all the world to her, she would fall dead at his feet. But she did not; nor did the slightest moan or cry escape her white lips.

She had expected that Philip Desmond would cry out in wonder or in anger when he saw her; that he would recognise her with some show of emotion. But he only looked at her, and then turned as carelessly away as any stranger might have done. And in that moment, as she stood there, the very bitterness of death passed over her.

Mrs. Desmond's next remark called their attention completely away from her, for which she was most thankful.

"Dear me, how very selfish I am!" exclaimed the grand old lady, in dismay. "I had forgotten how time is flying. The guests will be wondering why you and your bride tarry so long, my dear boy. A servant will show you to your suite of rooms. Your luggage must have been already taken there. You will want to make your

toilets. When you are ready to go down to the reception-room, let me know."

The few remarks that passed between them after that were almost unheard by Lois. She was so utterly lost in contemplating Philip Desmond's face.

Although but a few short months had elapsed, he looked as though long years had passed over his head. He seemed care-worn; but Lois could not help but see how splendidly handsome he still was. His face was pallid through its bronze; the dark blue eyes had lost their laughing expression, and were thoughtful almost to brooding; the brown hair, that had clustered about his broad forehead, seemed to have grown stronger and richer, and, to her great surprise, there were a few streaks of silver among the curling locks about his temples.

Lois had told herself over and over again, that when she was brought face to face with her false lover all the love in her heart for him would turn to hate. But she did not realise that true love in the hearts of noble women lived until their hearts ceased beating; that they could not crush it out at will, no matter how unworthy the object appeared to be.

Lois watched him with pitiful intentness until he turned away, and with his bride clinging to his arm, quitted the room.

"Do not forget to wear all the Desmond diamonds to-night, my dear," were the lady-mother's parting words. "Everyone is expecting to see them on you. They are famous. You will create a sensation in them; you will bewilder, dazzle, and astonish these country folk."

Lois did not hear the young wife's reply. She would have given all she possessed to throw herself on her knees on the spot his feet had pressed and weep her very life out.

Ah! why had he wooed her in that never-to-be forgotten past, made her love him, taken her heart from her, only to break it?

But Mrs. Desmond was calling her; there was no time for tears or emotion before the eyes of his mother, so she was forced to thrust aside her grief, let the pain be what it may.

"I am all unnerved over this meeting with my son and his bride," murmured the old lady. "I want you to bring me a cordial. Mix it yourself, Miss Davis."

A moment later, Miss Pauline glided into the room and went straight up to her mother's side.

"I have just greeted and welcomed Philip and his bride, mamma," she said, speaking before her mother's companion quite as though she had not been present. But she paused abruptly as though she thought it best to cut the sentence short.

"Well," replied her mother, eagerly, "do you like Philip's bride, Pauline? You always form an opinion, when you first meet a person, which usually proves to be correct."

"My brother does not look quite happy," replied Miss Pauline, slowly. "His bride is most beautiful—indeed, I have never met a young woman so strangely fascinating—but there is something about her that repels even while it draws me towards her."

"I experienced the same feeling, Pauline," returned Mrs. Desmond. "But it seems to me only natural that we should experience such a sensation when looking upon the face of the woman who has taken first place in the heart of my only boy and your only brother. As to Philip not being quite happy, I think that is purely your imagination, Pauline. There was a love match, and they are in the height of their honeymoon. Why should he not be happy, I ask you?"

"And I reply, mamma, that I do not know," replied Pauline, thoughtfully. "It is simply the way the expression of his face and his manners struck me. But I must hurry down to our guests again. Will you not accompany me, mamma, that we may both be together to receive them in the drawing-room and present them."

"Yes; as soon as I have taken the cordial Miss

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Davis is preparing for me," returned the mother. "I feel the need of something to brace me up, my dear."

It always seemed wonderful to Lois, when she looked back at that hour, that her strength lasted until mother and daughter had quitted the boudoir.

The sound of their footsteps had scarcely died away in the corridor outside ere her overstrained nerves gave way, and she sank to the floor in a dead faint.

While Lois lay in that death-like swoon, and the crash of the dance-music resounded gaily through the magnificent mansion, a thrilling little drama in real life was taking place in the blue-and-gold boudoir of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Desmond.

The young wife stood before the long French mirror, scarcely glancing at the superb picture she presented, as Antoinette, her maid, deftly put the finishing touches to her toilet.

"There is only one thing needed to make my lady fairly radiant to-night," declared Antoinette in her low, purring voice, "and that is the diamonds. You will let me get them all and deck you with them—twice them about that superb white neck, those perfect arms and—"

"Hush!" exclaimed Trixy, impatiently. "Didn't you hear me say I shouldn't wear the diamonds to-night?"

Philip Desmond, entering his wife's boudoir unexpectedly at that moment, could not help overhearing her remark.

His brows darkened, and a gleam of anger shot into his blue eyes. He stepped quickly to his wife's side.

"You will wear the diamonds!" he said in the most authoritative tone he had used to her. "You heard my mother express the wish that you should do so. Moreover, it has been the custom in our family for generations for brides to wear them at a reception given in honour of their home-coming. I should not like my wife to break that time-honoured custom, which the inhabitants about here have learned to look forward to with much interest. On my marriage, my mother sent them to you, and you will wear them to-night."

Was it only his fancy, or did Trixy turn deathly white under the light of the chandelier? But in the next instant she turned and faced him.

"I shall suit myself with regard to the ornaments I desire," she declared, petulantly. "I say I do not wish to wear any other ornaments than those pearls I have ordered Antoinette to lay out for me."

"I insist upon your wearing the diamonds, Mrs. Desmond," replied her husband, in a sharp, vibrating voice.

"I shall not be dictated to!" cried Trixy, shrilly. "I am not a paid retainer in your service, that you should dare assert your authority over me in a matter of this kind."

"We will waste no more words in arguing the point," replied her husband, sternly. "I command you to wear the diamonds to-night. I shall be ready to conduct you down to the reception-room in ten minutes," he added, consulting his watch.

With these words, he strode into his own room—an inner apartment—and closed the door after him with a bang.

Looking up into her young mistress's face, the shrewd Antoinette saw that she was greatly agitated, and pale as death. But she pretended not to notice it.

"Shall I not get the diamonds from your little hand-bag, my lady?" she asked, eagerly.

"No; you cannot get them," cried Trixy, hoarsely, her teeth chattering, her eyes fairly dilating with fright; "they are not there!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

YOUNG Mrs. Desmond stooped down until her lips were on a level with the maid's ear.

"My diamonds are not in the little leather hand-bag, Antoinette!" she panted. "The brute has come when I must make a confidant of you, and ask you to help me, Antoinette. You are

clever; your brain is full of resources; and you must help me out of this awful web that has tangled itself about me. I—I lost the diamonds on the night of the grand ball—the last night we were at Brighton, and—and I dare not tell my husband. Now you see my position, Antoinette. I—I cannot wear the diamonds, and I do not know how to turn my husband from his purpose of making me put them on. He may refuse to go down to the reception-room—or, still worse, he may ask for them. I cannot see the end, Antoinette. I am between two fires. I do not know which way to leap to save myself. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, my lady," returned the wily maid. "Leave your trouble to me. I will find some way to get you out of it."

"You must think quickly, Antoinette!" cried Trixy, excitedly. "He said he would return for me within ten minutes. Half that time has already passed. Oh—oh! what shall I do?"

"You must not excite yourself, my lady," replied Antoinette, quickly. "Worry brings wrinkles, and you cannot afford to have any but pleasant thoughts. I have said you can rely upon me to think of some way out of the dilemma."

"That is easier said than done, Antoinette," declared her mistress, beginning to pace excitedly up and down the room, the colour burning in two bright red spots on her cheeks.

Antoinette crossed over to the window, and stood looking out thoughtfully into the darkness. Her brain was busy with the numerous schemes that were flitting through it.

At that moment fate pointed out an unexpected way to her. She heard footsteps in the corridor, and just then it flashed upon Antoinette that she had heard her master giving orders to his valet to bring him a glass of brandy. The man was returning with it.

Quick as a flash Antoinette crossed the room and flung open the door.

"Andrew," she whispered to the man who was passing, "I want you to do a favour for me."

"A hundred if you like," replied the man, good-humouredly. "But I haven't time to listen to you now. I'll take master this brandy—which, by the way, is the best of its kind. I wish he'd take a notion to leave half of it in the glass, for it's fairly nectar—then I'd be back in a trice, and you can consider me at your service for the rest of the evening."

"But it's now I want you, Andrew—this very minute!" cried Antoinette. "Set your glass down here; nobody will see it; I'll keep guard over it. My errand won't take you more than a minute. Master won't miss his brandy for that short time. He'll enjoy it all the more when he gets it."

Andrew hesitated an instant, and we all know what happens to the man who hesitates—he is lost.

"Well, what is it you want, Antoinette?" he replied, good-humouredly. "If it only takes me a minute, as you say, I don't mind accommodating you."

"I lost my little gold cross in the lower hall a few moments ago. I heard something drop as I was hurrying along, but did not miss it until just now, and I can't leave my lady to go and get it. Some one may come along and find it, and I'd never get it again. For goodness' sake, go quick, Andrew, and look for it. Not an instant's to be lost."

Suspecting nothing, the good fellow hurriedly set down the glass, and hastened away to do her bidding.

His back was scarcely turned when Antoinette flew to her own apartments, which adjoined her mistress's, and took from her trunk, which she unlocked with a very strange-looking key, a small vial. A few grains of the contents she emptied into the palm of her hand, and in less time than it takes to write it they were transferred to the glass of brandy and dissolved at once with its amber contents.

She had scarcely accomplished this ere Andrew returned, quite flushed from hurrying.

"I am sorry to bring you bad news, Antoinette," he said; "but someone has been there before me and picked up your cross. I met

the butler, and we both searched for it. He has promised to make strict inquiries concerning it, and get it back for you if it be possible."

"You are very good to take so much trouble upon yourself," declared Antoinette, with a well-enacted sigh. "I suppose I shall survive the loss of it. It is a trinket that isn't of much value only as a keepsake. But I won't keep you standing there talking any longer, Andrew; your master will be waiting for the brandy."

"I'll see you later, Antoinette," he said, nodding as he picked up his glass.

The next moment he had disappeared within his master's apartments.

When she returned to her mistress she found Mrs. Desmond in a state of nervousness.

"The time is almost up, and you have devised no plan as yet, Antoinette," she cried, wringing her hands. "See, the ten minutes have almost elapsed. Oh—oh! what shall I do?"

"Monsieur will not come in ten minutes' time, my lady," replied the maid, with a knowing nod; "nor will he go to the reception. There was but one way out of it," declared Antoinette. "If he came after you to go down to the reception, the diamonds would have to be produced, so I said to myself he must not come, he must be prevented at all hazards. I knew of but one way, and acted upon the thought that came to me. Monsieur had ordered some brandy; I intercepted the valet, sent him off on a fool's errand, holding the glass until he returned, and while he was gone I put a heavy sleeping potion, which I often take for the toothache, in monsieur's glass of brandy. After taking it he will fall into a deep sleep, from which no one will be able to awake him. The consequence is, he will not come for my lady to take her down for the reception to-night, and she is free to suit herself as to whether she will wear diamonds or not. No other occasion for wearing them may take place for some time. I will think of something else by that time."

"You have saved me, Antoinette!" cried the guilty woman, sinking down upon the nearest chair and trembling with excitement. "Oh, how can I ever thank you!"

"If my lady would do something in the way of raising my pay, I would be much obliged," replied the girl, her black eyes glittering.

She knew the trembling woman before her was in her power. The game had been commenced, the first trump had been played, and Antoinette meant to win all in the end.

"I shall only be too glad to do so," returned Trixy, realising for the first time the unpleasantness of being dictated to by her maid.

"And if madame would make me a present of some money to-night, I could make excellent use of it."

"I haven't any ready money just now," returned Trixy, a dull red flush creeping over the whiteness of her face. "I have spent all last month's allowance, and it's only the middle of the month now."

"I would take the gold chain in the jewel-case which madame never wears," replied the girl, boldly.

"Antoinette, you are a fiend!" cried Trixy, starting to her feet in a rage. "How dare you expect that I would give you my gold chain, girl?"

"Madame could not afford to refuse my request," answered the girl. "If she wants me to keep her secret, she must pay well. The service I have rendered to-night is worth what I ask."

"Take the chain," said young Mrs. Desmond, with a short gasp. "I—I shall not need your services after to-night. Take the chain, and—go!"

"So, so, madame!" cried the girl. "That is the way you would repay me for what I have done for you! Discharge Antoinette, eh. Oh, no, my lady; you will think better of those hasty words, especially as I have a suspicion of where madame's diamonds have gone."

"I lost them at the ball that night in Brighton," cried Trixy, springing hastily to her feet and facing the girl, her temper at a white heat.

"Monsieur Lloyd Villiers was with my lady

when she lost them," returned Antoinette, softly. "She wore them when she entered the carriage on the beach that night, and she returned at day-break with out them. You would not like monsieur to know of that romantic little episode, eh?"

"I repeat, you are a fiend incarnate!" gasped Trixy, trembling like an aspen leaf.

"My lady sees it would be better to temporise with Antoinette than to make an enemy of her. She will think better of discharging one whose assistance may prove valuable to her. I will say no more. They are coming to see what detains madame and her husband, little dreaming what is in store for them."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE strangeness of the situation seemed to confuse Trixy. She wondered if she were not dreaming.

For one minute, mistress and maid stood looking in each other's face. The eyes of one expressed astonishment, the other's eyes were triumphant.

"Tell me that again," panted young Mrs. Desmond. "I—I—did not quite comprehend, Antoinette."

"I said I managed to slip a sleeping-potion in a glass of brandy he was about to take," repeated the girl, with a low little laugh. "By this time he is asleep, and he will sleep so soundly that the thoughts of the grand reception and the guests awaiting him down-stairs won't trouble him. He will not be here to insist upon your wearing the diamonds, my lady."

"Oh, you have saved me!—you have saved me!" cried Trixy, drawing a long breath. "The chain you crave is yours, and you shall have, too, the little diamond locket lying in the case beside it. They are coming for us, Antoinette," she said, with intense nervousness. "What if anything has happened to prevent him from taking the brandy?"

The sound of footsteps in the corridor without drew nearer and nearer, and stopped at the door. There was a light tap, and a voice which Trixy knew was Pauline's, said, eagerly:

"Are you and your wife not ready yet, brother Phillip? You forget how time is flying, and how impatient our guests are."

"You must think of an answer quickly, Antoinette," murmured the young wife, huskily. "My brain refuses to act."

But Antoinette was spared that trouble; for at that moment Andrew, the valet, came flying out of his master's room.

"Oh, Miss Pauline! Miss Pauline!" he cried, hoarsely, "how can I ever tell you what has happened? But it was a mistake—indeed, it was all a mistake! I do not see how I ever came to do it!"

Pauline Desmond hurriedly caught the man's arm in a firm grasp, looking sternly in the face.

"Andrew," she said, with great calmness, "stop that shouting, and tell me instantly what the matter is. Has—has—anything happened to my brother or—or his wife?"

Her quiet tone brought the valet to his senses more quickly than anything else could have done.

"Yes, I'll tell you, Miss Pauline," he answered, hoarsely; "and though master turns me off to-morrow for it, I swear to you earnestly that it was all a terrible mistake."

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FACETIE.

"WHAT is your definition of optimism?" "It is a determination to enjoy life whether you do or not."

He: "Don't you think my friend made some pretty broad remarks?" She: "Yes; broad enough, but not very deep."

"JANE, did you break this valuable china plate?" "Yes'm. You were taken in over that plate, mum. It's a weak 'un. It broke the fourth time I dropped it!"

"PA," said a bright boy, "I know what makes folks laugh in their sleeves." "Well, my son, what makes them?" "'Cause that's where their funny-bone is."

FIDDLER: "Yes, Boston has turned out a great many musicians—'yours truly' among the number." Quis: "Well, how can you blame her."

"MR. MILLARS," said little Tommy Tucker to the corporal guest, "I don't see why mamma said I mustn't say anything about your neck. You haven't got any neck!"

"JUST see what handsome teeth Miss Straight-jaws has." "Thank you, you're very complimentary." "Ah, pardon me! you are perhaps her father?" "No, her dentist."

AGED MILLIONAIRE: "And you refuse me?" "Miss Beauty: "I am sorry, sir, but I cannot be your wife." "Is it because I am too old?" "No. Because you are not older."

JENNY: "But, Fred, are you really running behind so much?" Fred: "Well, I keep my clothes in the drawer of my desk and my unpaid bills in the wardrobe."

Mrs G. SMYTHE GOTBOX (graciously): "This portrait will make your reputation in this country, I am sure, m'dieu!" M. Coldini (galantly): "And yours, also, I trust, madam."

He: "I heard an alarm of fire, I think; I must go and see where it is." Returning after twenty minutes: "It wasn't fire," he said, shortly. "Nor water either," she replied, still more briefly.

"BRIDGET, how did it happen that when we came in last night after the theatre there was a policeman in the kitchen?" "Sure, mum, Ol don't know; but Ol think the theatre didn't last as long as usual."

HOBSON: "I notice that a reporter has just written over four hundred words in a minute." Hobson: "Yes; but he's nothing to be compared with the actor who writes a letter on the stage."

"MR SHOWMAN," said an inquiring individual at the menagerie, "can the leopard change his spots?" "Yes, sir," replies the individual who sits up the wild beasts; "when he is tired of one spot he goes to another."

Mrs. NEWRICH: "I like that paper." Miss Newrich: "But, mother, I am afraid the colour is much too warm for the room." Mrs. Newrich: "Well, let him put one of them freezers around it what he was talking about."

PORT'S SON: "Why, Freddy, how dirty you are, and only yesterday you wrote a verse for papa's birthday, promising always to wash your hands clean." "Well, mamma, that was only a poetic licence."

DUMBLEY: "How much do you ask for that piece of land?" Robinson: "I'll sell it to you for a mere song." Dumbley: "To the tune of—?" Robinson: "Five thousand pounds." Dumbley: "Oh, one of Pavi's songs!"

POMPONS AUTHOR (to veteran editor): "What would you advise a man to do whose ideas are in advance of the times?" Veteran Editor (promptly): "I would advise him to sit down and wait for the times to catch up!"

LITTLE Dorothy who was playing with her little kittens one day, turned to her mamma and said, "Where will my kitten go when it dies?" Her mamma, for lack of a better answer, said, "You had better ask your papa." "Oh yes," said Dorothy, "that is too hard a question for ladies to answer."

JUDGE: "Why did you commit this unprovoked assault?" Prisoner: "I wanted to get my picture in the papers." Judge: "Well, will you be good, if I let you go?" Prisoner: "I am afraid not. I now want to kill the artists who made the pictures."

"CONFOUND you and your old grocery!" shouted the man who had backed up against the fresh paint. "Didn't you see that sign 'Fresh paint'?" asked the grocer. "Of course I did; but I've seen so many signs hung out here announcing something fresh that wasn't, that I didn't believe it."

"Oh, George," said a nervous lady to her husband, "do you think we shall have a safe voyage?" "Perfectly safe, my dear," replied George. "I have been talking with the captain, and he tells me he has never been drowned yet, though he has been crossing continually since he was a cabin boy."

A DOCTOR having stated that he could diagnose ailments by examining a single hair of the patient, two young men, as a joke, took him a hair from an old horse. The doctor gravely wrote a prescription, and said his fee was a guinea, as the case was precarious. They were staggered, but paid the fee and went outside laughing all the way to the chemist's. The latter took the prescription, and, in amazement, read, "Turn the animal out to grass." Then the jokers stopped laughing.

MATERFAMILIAR (to candidate for the post [of cook]): "Your general character is excellent; but before engaging you I must find out something more from your last mistress about your cooking of fancy dishes." Candidate: "Oh, you may make your mind easy on that point, mum. The last family I lived with was just gettin' into society through their table."

MR. SIMKINS is a great enthusiast on the subject of "chest protectors," which he recommends to people on every occasion. "A great thing!" he says. "They make people more healthy, increase their strength, and lengthen their lives." "But what about our ancestors?" some one asked. "They didn't have any chest protectors, did they?" "They did not," said Mr. Simkins, triumphantly, "and where are they now? All dead!"

YOUNG MAN: "Doctor, you have been attending me for a week, and I am worse than I was at the start." Physician: "I will be frank with you, sir. Being unable to discover what was the matter with you, and being unwilling to risk interfering with the curative powers of nature, I have given you no medicine at all. In fact, my treatment has not commenced yet." "But you have given me pills right along." "They were only a sham. They were made of bread." "Where did you get the bread?" "Your young and charming wife made it." "No wonder I'm worse."

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SOCIETY.

THE Duchess of York has given the weight of her example to a system which has been established in connection with the Princess Mary's Village Homes of ladies adopting each a child to be under their especial guardianship. Her Royal Highness having thus selected a little girl to whose maintenance she will contribute so long as the child remains in the institution.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales are expected at Cronberg this month on a visit to the Empress Frederick, whence they will go to Amsterdam for the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. The Prince of Wales intends to visit Homburg this year, and will also stay at Baden-Baden during the race week.

THE throne-room of the Sultan, at Constantinople, is a gorgeous sight. The gilding is unequalled by any other building in Europe, and from the ceiling hangs a superb Venetian chandelier, the two hundred lights of which make a gleam like that of a variable sun. At each of the four corners of the room, tall candelabra in Bacarat glass are placed, and the throne is a huge seat covered with red velvet, and having arms and back of pure gold.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS CHRISTIAN will be away from England until the beginning of October. Prince Christian has gone to the baths at Kissingen for a month, and Princess Helena to Bad Nauheim, and will afterwards visit the Empress Frederick at Cronberg, and the German Emperor and Empress at Wilhelmshöhe, near Cassel.

THE Duke and Duchess of Fife have gone to Scotland until the end of October and intend to stay for some weeks at Duff House, Banffshire, before going to Upper Deeside to spend the shooting season at Mar Lodge. Duff House was built about a hundred years ago in imitation of the Villa Borghese, and contains a very valuable collection of pictures and a good library. The grounds, which are intersected by the Deveron, are richly wooded, and the whole place is attractive in all respects; but Duff is usually closed for about eleven months in the year. It is probable that the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of York, Count Mandorff, the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, and Lord James of Hereford will be among the guests at Mar Lodge during the latter part of September.

THE Duchess of Connaught is quite the leader of fashion among Army ladies. The hot weather brought Her Royal Highness out in a very stylish costume bodice made for wearing with a skirt of the same material. A seamless front sets with slightly bouffant fullness at the waist, the latter being completed by a draped satin band, which fastens beneath a bow at the left side. The bodice fastens in centre of front, then round the armhole, and at the under-arm seam. The sleeve is a pretty and stylish model shaped with a separate upper and under, the former gathering to the lining upper a trifle between the seams at the shoulder. A pretty double epaulette, made on the double of the material, interlined with muslin, and bordered with ruching trims each shoulder, and the wrist is fashionably finished with a roll cuff interlined with muslin, lined with silk, and edged with chiffon. An upright collar shaped in canvas, covered with the material, and outlined with a narrow ruche, finishes the neck. The bodice is composed of pretty-pattern silk figured goods of light texture combined with silk and satin, and trimmed with chiffon ruching. There is a yoke effect of pleated silk behind. In front the pleated yoke is met by a scalloped draped front, which gathers slightly at armhole and in centre of front. There is a seamless back scalloped, which forms a centre point on the yoke, thus matching the front, except that the back is plain setting across the shoulders instead of gathering.

STATISTICS.

AN employer of German clerks says that they work 20 per cent. slower than English ones.

ITALY has 4,800,000 lemon trees, which produce 1,260,000,000 lemons per annum.

LONDON postmen are said to walk on the average 12 miles a day.

THE force of waves breaking on the shore is equal to seventeen tons to the square yard.

THE value of the average annual productions of the earth has been estimated at £2,241,142,100.

ONE whale will furnish from 1,000lb. to 3,000lb. of bone. At San Francisco the bone is split, sorted as to colour, and tied in bundles. These split pieces are called slabs, and are 3ft. to 5ft. long, and weigh from 8lb. to 7lb.

GEMS.

IT is the small temptations which undermine integrity.

VICE we can learn of ourselves; but virtue and wisdom require a tutor.

SUCCESS in most things is in knowing how long it takes to succeed.

NOR education, but character, is man's greatest safeguard.

A GREAT fortune often serves as an impregnable fortress to resist the advance of contentment.

IF we keep ourselves quite where our lot has been cast, and do the duties appointed us, we shall find that things seek us in a wonderful manner. It is when we go out of our way to seek them that we miss what we most desire to find, or finding the letter of our hopes, we miss the spirit.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE DUMPLINGS THAT EVERY ONE MAY EAT.

—To one cup of flour, into which a heaping teaspoonful of baking powder is mixed, add six cups of boiled, finely mashed potato, which should be entirely free from lumps. This is best secured by passing it through a sieve. Make into a paste with sufficient milk to make it adhere, add salt, a lump of perfectly sweet butter the size of an egg, mix as quickly as possible and roll into wrappers about the size of a tea plate and half an inch thick. Cut the apples into quarters or smaller pieces if desired, and to one cup of apple add one rounding tablespoonful of sugar and a lump of butter the size of a hickory nut. Roll the dough round the apple and steam for one hour.

ICE CREAM.—The only way to make real ice cream is to use pure sweet cream, with one-half pound loaf-sugar to each quart of cream. Cheaper ways, however, that give fair results, are, to boil a soft custard, six eggs to each quart of milk (eggs well beat). Another is to boil one quart of milk, and stir into it while boiling one tablespoonful of arrowroot, wet with cold milk, when cool stir into it the yolk of one egg to give it a rich colour. Five minutes boiling is enough for either plan. Put the sugar in after they cool. Keep the same proportions for any amount desired. Or, again, to six quarts of milk, add one-half pound of Oswego starch, just dissolved; put the starch in one quart of milk, then mix with rest of milk and simmer, not boil; sweeten and flavour to your taste; excellent. You can make it of strawberry or any fruit flavour by adding sufficient of the juice when they are in season, or adding extracts when not. About one half-ounce essence or extracts to the gallon, or suit the taste. Have your ice well-broken; one quart of salt to a bucket of ice. One-half hour's constant stirring, with occasional beating and scraping down, should freeze it sufficiently.

MISCELLANEOUS.

FLOUR, pressed into bricks, is in use in the army to facilitate transportation.

IN Japan coins are generally of iron and in Siam they are chiefly of porcelain.

THE signals used by ships at sea date from 1665. They were invented by the Duke of York, afterwards James II.

SEVEN earthquakes are frequently not felt at all some distance below the surface—as in deep coal-mines.

THE wonderful part of the Maxim gun is that it has only one barrel, and yet it can discharge 600 shots in one minute.

ALL French subjects who are seventy or more years of age have a right to claim admission to one of the hospices, where they are well housed and fed.

THE most costly tomb in existence is that which was erected to the memory of Mohammed. The diamonds and rubies used in the decorations are worth £2,000,000.

THE whole Moslem race despise and hate the sound of bells, which they say cause the evil spirits to assemble together. In consequence, they are never used on Mohammedan mosques.

BOTTLES are now being made of paper under a German patent. They are for use particularly on shipboard, where heavy weather works havoc among glass receptacles.

THE lantern of Surinam, South America, has two sets of eyes, to catch the light from all possible directions. The luminosity which glows from the head is so brilliant that it is easy to read by it.

THE hump on the back of a dromedary is an accumulation of a peculiar species of fat, which is a store of nourishment beneficently provided against the day of want, to which the animal is often exposed. The dromedary or camel can exist for a long period upon this hump without any other food.

THE Chinese are perhaps the most lightly taxed people in the world. In China all the land belongs to the State, and a trifling sum per acre—never altered through long centuries—is paid as rent. This is the only tax in the country, and it amounts to about half-a-crown per head yearly.

CARRIER PIGEONS in China are protected from birds of prey by a little apparatus consisting of thin bamboo tubes fastened to the birds' bodies with thread passed beneath the wings. As the pigeon flies along the action of the air through the tubes produces a shrill whistling sound, which keeps birds of prey at a respectful distance.

OMIO is to try the experiment of caring for its state imbeciles in farm villages, rather than to confine them in narrow rooms in public institutions. The state legislature has lately passed a law granting this authority. It is a theory of the promoters of the new law that agricultural pursuits tend to raise the standard of intelligence among imbeciles.

IT is impossible, except by illustration and comparison, to grasp the idea of the heat of the sun. According to calculations, based upon the energy of the sun's rays on the earth, the temperature at its surface is computed as about 18,000 degrees Fahrenheit. No artificial temperature of this degree can be created by any known means. Efforts have been made to collect and utilize the tremendous heat power of the sun, but cloudiness, mist and darkness have prevented anything like marked success. At the Columbian Exposition an apparatus was shown consisting of a reflector and proper attachments, which utilized the heat of the sun to such an effect that a two horse-power engine was run by it. It is proposed to try experimenting with reflectors in countries where the sky is free of cloudiness and the sun shines almost uninterruptedly nearly every day in the year.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

IGNORANCE.—Hydrocephalus is water in the head.
ANGLO-INDIAN.—Calcutta is the capital of British India.

VERA.—In the public streets the superior should first salute the inferior.

TRIM.—Everything depends on the exact terms of the hiring contract.

LOVELY LASS.—Marriage with a deceased wife's sister is illegal in this country.

PREPARE TOM.—Application should be made locally to some employer of such labour.

BLANCA.—Surnames came into general use in England during the fourteenth century.

A. B. C.—Apply to some professional agent who carries on that sort of business.

BACCHUS.—Russia ranks as sixth among the wine producing countries of the world.

BILL.—Healthy youths generally cease growing in stature at about twenty years of age.

NEWT MARSHEN.—The wife can be sued for a debt contracted by herself before marriage.

W. M.—We could not undertake to guide you in manipulating photographic materials.

THREE LITTLE MAIDS.—The personal property should be divided equally between the next-of-kin.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Washing of windows in the water is preferable to soap for cleaning windows or paint.

JACK OF ALL TRADES.—The words of songs cannot legally be set to music without the permission of the author.

MODERT.—If you loved the girl in earnest you would not be slow in ascertaining whether the feeling was reciprocated.

POREL.—An element of uncertainty lurks in such warfare that may at any time upset the most careful calculations.

DOLLY.—We know of nothing that would not be likely to harm the kid, and therefore make matters worse than before.

A. F. M.—An affiliation order may be applied for at any time within twelve months of the last payment on account of the child.

INQUIRE.—Brisil is a Portuguese term derived from *brasa*, "a live coal," an allusion to the red dyewood with which the country abounds.

PUEZLER.—The eyelashes are placed in front of the eyes to protect those delicate organs from the light and from the entrance of foreign objects.

H. A.—Water should never be used that has been held in a lead pipe all night, and it should be allowed to run freely before any is taken for use.

SECOND TO NONE.—An Emperor is supposed to be a sovereign of several countries; therefore the courtly etiquette is to rank him higher than a king.

MAINTEN FAIR.—One of the most effectual remedies for slaty and greasy drain pipes is copperas dissolved and left to work gradually through the pipes.

BAREFOOT.—Go more into society. A collected demagogue can only be acquired by associating with those who have mixed much in the busy world.

CHARLOTTE.—We cannot say. At one chemist's you would get as much for a penny as you would at another chemist's have to pay threepence or fourpence for.

L. T.—If you allow the rusted things to lie for a short time in kerosene oil you will find the rust may be easily removed by rubbing. A piece of cork is a good rubber.

ABSORB.—Should you die intestate, there would most likely be a scramble for the money, and the people you would wish to benefit would, most likely, get nothing.

SOCIETY LADY.—Consult a specialist. It would be by far the best thing to do. As to using arsenic for the complexion, do not do it without a physician's advice and prescription.

HEAVY FOOTER.—An increase in the thickness of regular soles and the inner layer will be found advantageous. The shoemaker will be able to do better for you than anyone else.

P. W.—The coin of which you speak is a Brazilian piece. It has no premium value. It may be worth its face. We think it a dollar, and a Brazilian dollar is worth about thirty cents.

BELLE.—Make a syrup of one pound of sugar, two breakfast cups water, three quarters of an ounce of tartaric acid. Boil it, and add a few drops of oil of saffron to taste, and use.

BOOKWORK.—The largest history ever published is "The War of the Rebellion," issued by the American Government, in one hundred and twenty huge octavo volumes of one thousand pages each, with a gigantic atlas in thirty parts.

UNION JACK.—Members of Parliament do not receive any remuneration for their services. Formerly city and borough members were allowed a certain sum for expenses by their constituents, but that practice has long fallen into disuse.

P. F.—Your far best and cheapest plan to make potato water at home is to get a gasolene and potato powders; that makes it perfectly; you cannot make it in bottles with any success.

ANXIOUS READER.—If the trouble is at all serious, no time should be lost in consulting a physician. It is not wise to allow such complaints to go unheeded for. Health is a possession too precious to risk by neglect.

A WORRIED YOUNG MISTRESS.—Unless there was an agreement for a month on trial, the servant must give a month's notice which she can do at any time. Wages are not due until the end of the month's service.

FEMALE CYCLIST.—Where a female is carried on the tandem, and rides in front, the steering may then be in the hands of the male behind who has, of course, greater strength of arm, and really looks over her head.

WRITER.—When a pen has been used until it appears to be spoiled, place it over a flame (a gaslight for instance) for a quarter of a minute, then dip it into water and it will be again fit for work. A new pen which is found too hard to write with will become softer by being thus heated.

THWARTED.

I hoped to walk along the world's bright ways,
And gather tinted flowers here and there.
I planned to do great work while the sweet days
Should cast their brightness on Life's summer air.

I dreamed of fame and even thought to win
Its coronal for my poor human brow.
And in my soul of souls—it seemed no sin
That the great world to me should sometimes bow.

The years went onward; others passed along
And gathered flowers I thought had bloomed for me.
I heard the echo of Fame's lend, clear song
For those who on the heights walked fearlessly.

I walk along among the surging crowd
And smile with them, and bow the tired knee
To those upon the heights—I am too proud
My wounded, bleeding heart, to let them see.

J. S.—They have been badly washed for a time; smacking the blankets in sulphur fumes whitens them, but it is too troublesome; wash them carefully and dry in the open air on a good sunny day, and you can do no more for them.

FIN DE SIÈCLE.—This is the nineteenth century; 1901 is certainly the twentieth century; when a person is eighteen years and some months old, he is said to be in his nineteenth year; the centuries are described in the same way, therefore 1898 is the nineteenth century.

UNHAPPY MAJOR.—What happens is that after perhaps five years, or so, a deserter is no longer looked after, and except he is reported to the authorities on re-appearance in the district, will not be apprehended; but the right to take him does not lapse with time as you suggest.

WANTING ADVICE.—The affair seems very simple, indeed. Surely a man is much more cowardly to desert those who are dependent upon him and to go away, leaving them to suffer for the necessities of life, than to stand up and bear his responsibilities bravely, doing his duty as he sees fit day by day.

S. F. R.—They should be cleaned before you put them to the fire with emery paper and brickdust. If after they are heated they are not what you like rub them on powdered brick dust sprinkled over brown paper. Rub that off with a clean rag, and then pass each over a sheet of paper greased with white wax. Again wipe off with a clean rag, and it is ready.

CURIOUS.—Raisins are ripe grapes dried in the sun by placing them on sloping banks of red clay at the foot of a wall, and perfectly protected by wooden covering boards, so as to keep off all rain and dew, either of which is fatal to good quality. The bunches are turned once only, with the greatest care, and in two or three weeks grapes become raisins.

JURIST.—There is not, as far as we know, any book in existence which would assist you in the business you have in view; the truth is that success in such a line is a matter of keen competition, and it is necessary to be always thinking out some new way of attracting public attention, or securing patronage in order to get ahead of one's rivals about.

AN AMBITIOUS GIRL.—Success in any line depends almost wholly upon the application of the individual who is working it; girls lose themselves by shifting from one thing to another, never knowing what they would be at, and constantly expecting something better than they have in hand, whereas by sitting down steadily to anyone of many businesses they have tried they could have succeeded well.

RODENTION.—Eminent scientists who have made a study of the subject have found bacilli that destroy the hairs. Just how these tiny creatures become disseminated is a matter for discussion. It has long been known and understood that such small creatures may be distributed by the most ordinary means. Being invisible, they are not suspected, and carry on their mischievous occupation un molested until great harm is done—sometimes to an extent that is altogether past remedy.

E. N. V.—You had better write straight to the Secretary to Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W., who will forward the desired information in printed form, gratis, at once; but we may say that apart from the educational qualifications it is necessary that you should, first of all, be nominated to the Home Secretary by a member of Parliament or other influential person; that secures that your name should be put upon the list of candidates for next vacancies, and you will be called upon to come forward for examination when a vacancy occurs.

SIXTEN DORA.—Apply to the superintendent of the institution; the qualifications vary, but in all well regulated hospitals and infirmaries now nurses must pass examinations into their fitness for the work, after attending a series of lectures, or being trained by medical instructors; there is no strict age limit, but women on entering are considered most acceptable if not over twenty-five years; the knowledge of nursing you mention would be acquired after you were admitted as a probationer, and before you were passed as a duly qualified nurse.

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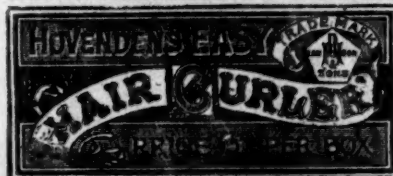
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